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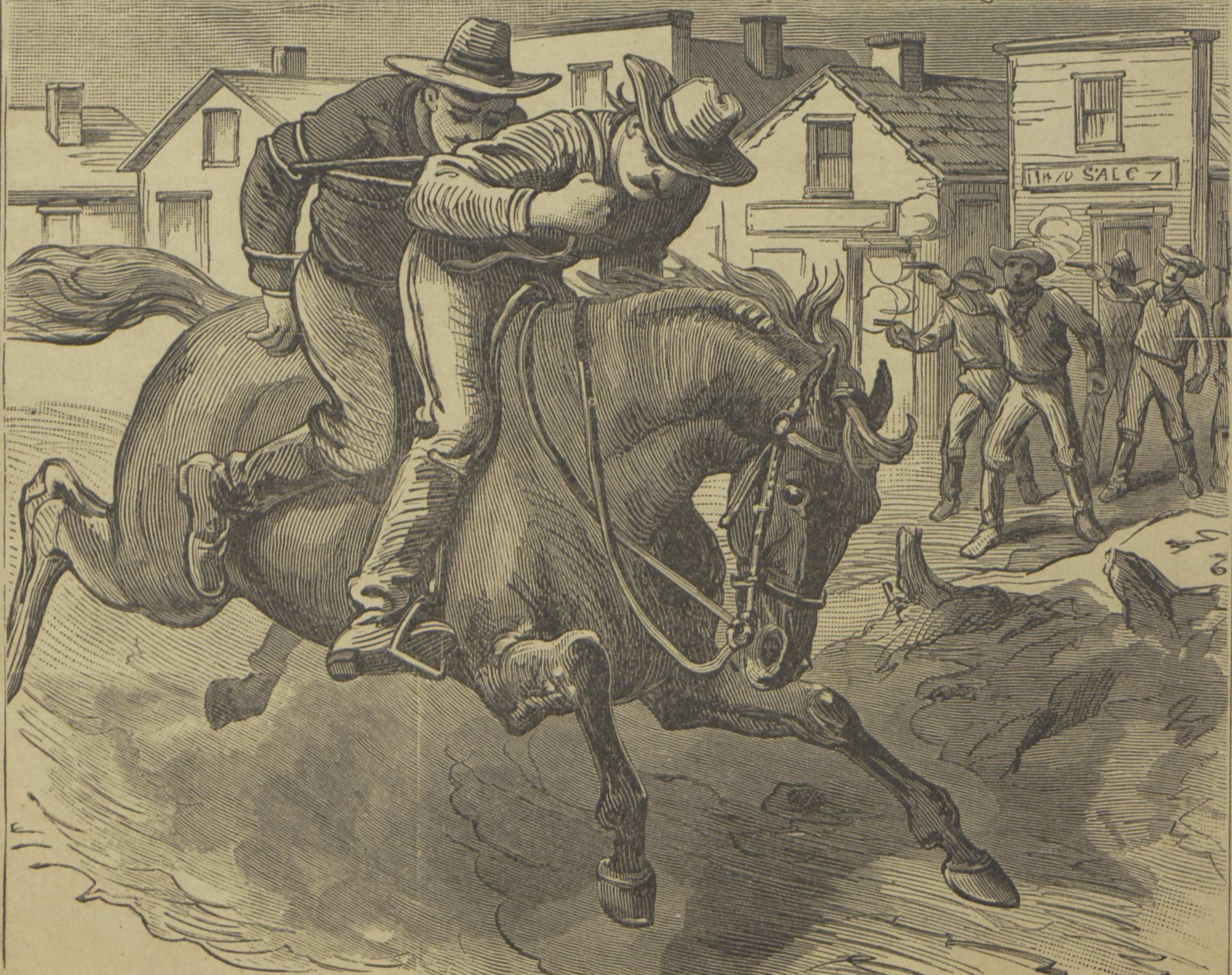
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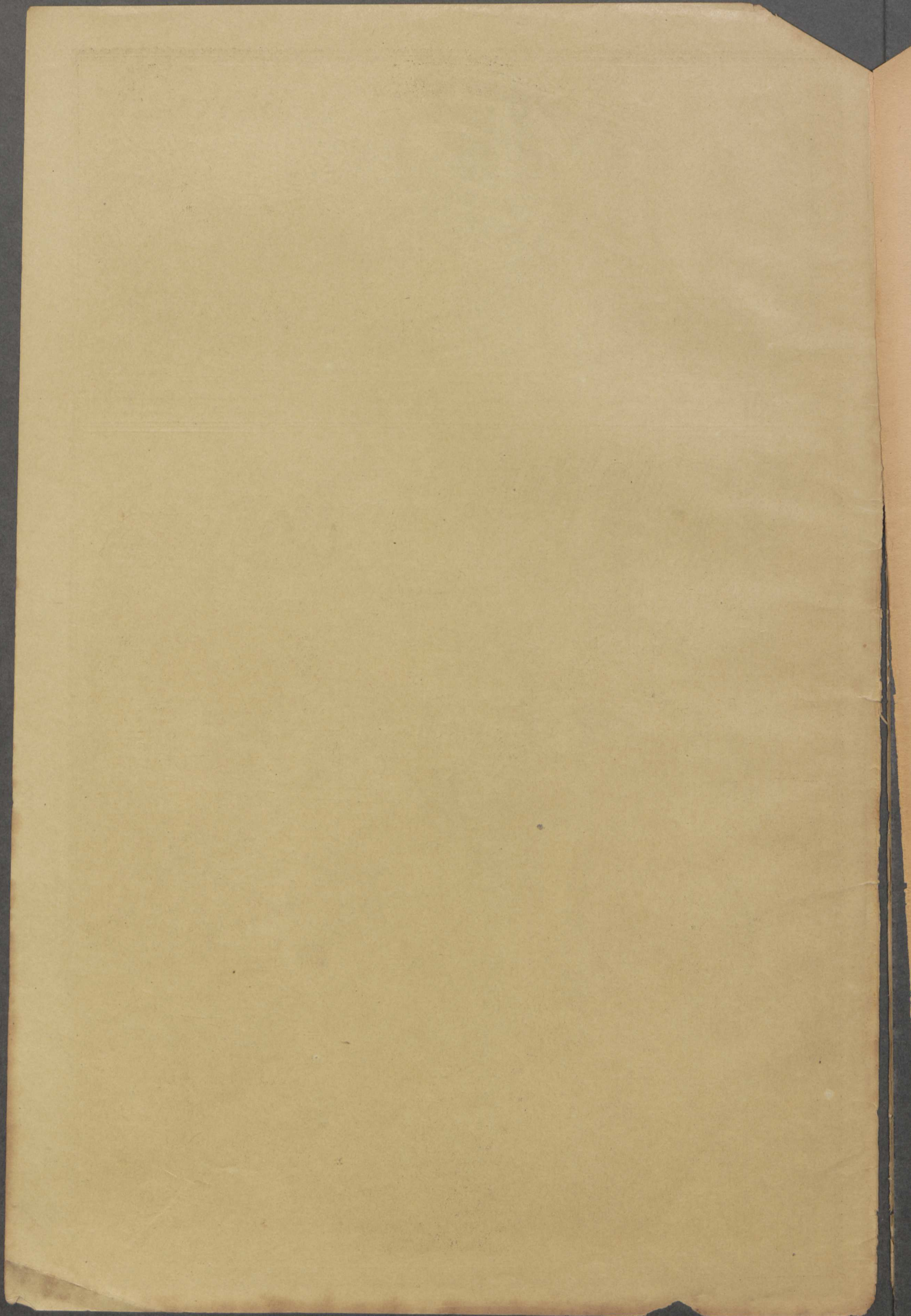
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Vol. LXXVIII.

BUFFALO BILL'S DARING DEED OR THE SOURCE OF THE COLD RAIL. BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM



BENDING LOW IN THE SADDLE BUFFALO BILL FAIRLY FLEW WHILE THE BULLETS WENT WILD.



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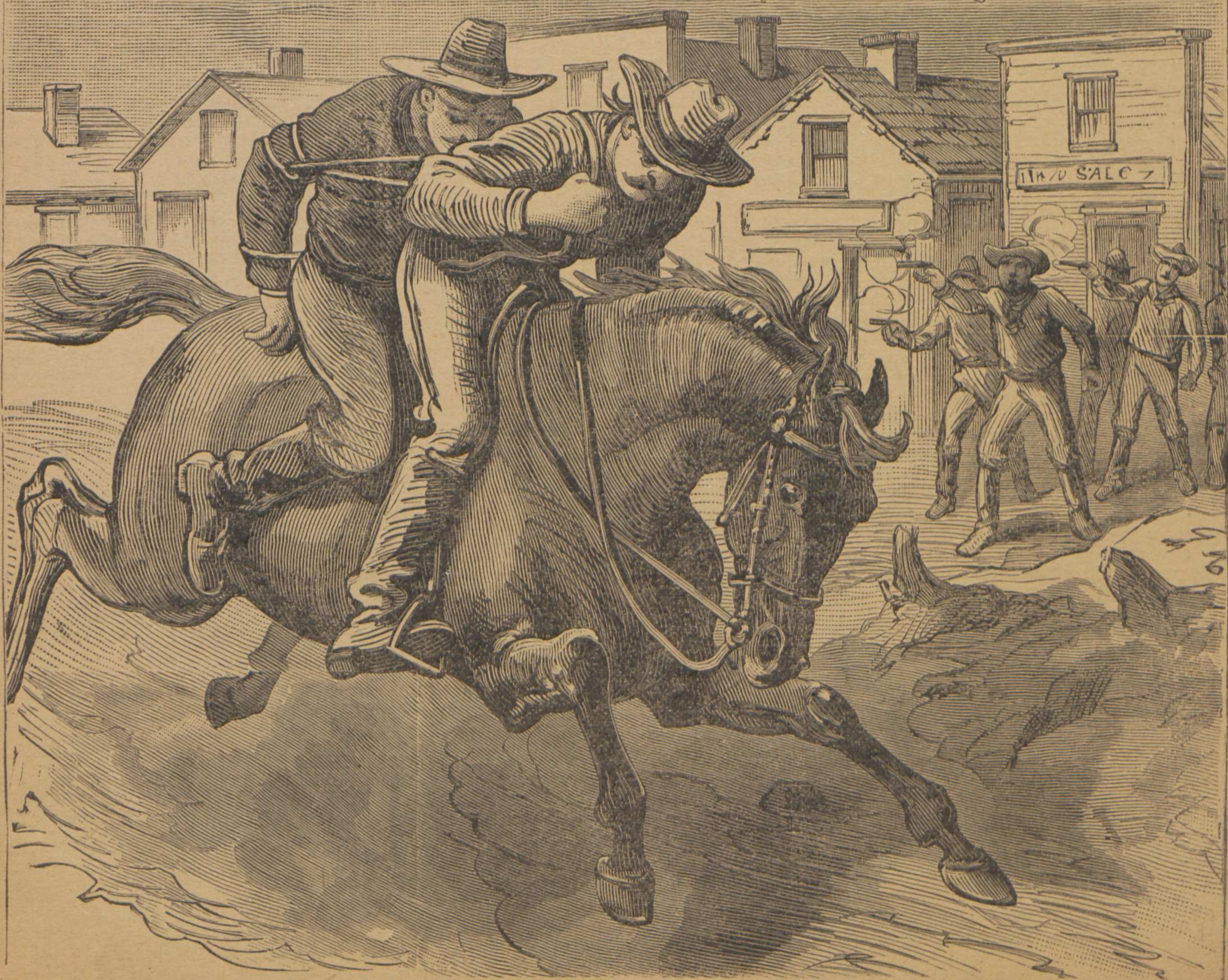
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BENDING LOW IN THE SADDLE BUFFALO BILL FAIRLY FLEW, WHILE THE BULLETS WENT WILD.

BUFFALO BILL'S DARING DEED; OR, THE SCOURGE OF THE GOLD TRAIL.

By COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

BUFFALO BILL AND HIS PARD.

"Dart Deering, you must do me a great favor."

"If it's to give up my life for you, Buffalo Bill."

"Thanks, old pard; but I ask that of no man."

"Yet you are ever ready to sacrifice yourself for others."

"I take chances, yes, but always with the hope or belief I will pull through all right."

"And you do, whether from your proverbial luck, for 'Buffalo Bill's luck' is famous, or from skill, nerve, and daring, or all combined, I do not know; but you do it, Bill, as well I know."

"But what is it I can do for you?"

"I'll tell you."

"I was laying off for a few months, as you know, and had engaged, for big money, to guide a wagon train of emigrants into Arizona from Kansas."

"Now they are not the ordinary kind of emigrant by any means, but a mighty good class of people, the leader being a Mexican gentleman, and an army officer, and who married an American girl."

"She was the daughter of a United States army officer, an only child, and spent her early life upon the frontier and in the forts from Benton to the Rio Grande, and it was in Texas she met Don Ellwardo, whom she married."

"He was rich, went to New York, lost most of his fortune, and then settled in Kansas, but has been urged by his wife to seek a new home in Arizona, near Fort Flagstaff, where she spent several years with her father."

"Well, Bill?"

"They are going there, and their neighbors in Kansas, four other families, are accompanying them."

"A large party?"

"With servants and attendants, some half a hundred in number."

"They are aiming for a wild land."

"Yes, but there are several settlers about them; it is up on the old Mormon Trail up to Salt Lake, and, though Fort Flagstaff has been abandoned, there is a small settlement there."

"Yes, I know, and a hard lot of whites, not to speak of several tribes of mighty ugly redskins."

"Yes, and these people are mostly a refined lot, yet have the pluck to rough it and face all dangers."

"The Don's wife is a lovely woman, and they have a daughter, who is beautiful, and only about eighteen, and a son of fifteen."

"They are all splendidly equipped, and a brave, fine lot, and I am only sorry I cannot guide them to their destination, for, though I know something of that country, I am not posted as well there as I am further north."

"Why don't you go, Buffalo Bill?"

"Ah! That's just it."

"I had engaged to do so, for the Don had a letter to me from Colonel Sumner; but to-day I received orders from the Commanding General of the Department to report with all dispatch back at my command, to lead a large force against the Sioux, and I start to-night."

"And the Don, Pard Bill?"

"That is just why I came to you, Dart, for I know that you are well acquainted with that country, and I wish you to take my place, for there is no better guide in this country than you are."

"I thank you for the compliment, Bill, and, as you cannot go, I'll do it, and you can depend upon me to take good care of your friends."

"I know that well, Dart."

"But you are a mighty good-looking

fellow, and a lady-killer, I have heard, so don't fall in love with the Don's daughter, or any of the other pretty girls of the outfit."

"I'll be careful, Bill, and I'm not half so bad as I am painted."

"But where are these people?"

"On the lower trail in camp."

"Get ready and I'll take you over and introduce you to the Don, and tell him I have persuaded you to take my place, and he can trust you in everything."

"Thanks, but it did not take much persuading, Bill, as the pay, you say, is big, the work is congenial, I am idle just now, and, more, I'd do anything to serve you, for I have not forgotten that more than once I owe my life to William F. Cody, Chief of Scouts, United States Army, and that you risked your life to save mine, pard."

"As you would have done for me; but come, we'll start."

Dart Deering made his toilet with care, locked his cabin, and, mounting a very handsome horse, he rode off by the side of Buffalo Bill.

They were a magnificent-looking pair of men, about the same in size and bearing, only Dart Deering was a blonde, while Buffalo Bill was a brunette.

The latter had made a world-wide name even then as a scout, guide, and Indian fighter, and Dart Deering was also known along the frontier as a daring and skilled plainsman, but one who had won fame as much from his tireless hunt for gold, rather than a desire to become what circumstances had made him, as his search for the yellow metal had not yet been much of a success.

A ride of half a dozen miles brought the two to a pleasant camp in a valley, and Buffalo Bill and his comrade were greeted with a cheer by a number of boys who belonged to the outfit.

CHAPTER II.

A DREAD OF EVIL.

Don Enrique Ellwardo was a man of fine presence and a courtly Mexican gentleman, just nearing the half century mark.

His wife was a beautiful woman, half a score of years his junior, and it was not to be wondered at that Senorita Idolene, their daughter, was a very handsome girl, with a certain frankness and dash in her manner which her early life had engendered.

Mora Ellwardo, the son, was very like his father, a fine-looking, daring lad of fifteen, and who was the leader of the half dozen other lads of the outfit.

Well equipped as all were, with cattle, horses, servants, trainmen, and all necessities for the dangerous march, for dangerous it was, the people of the wagon train were ready to face the worst, and made up a congenial party.

They had rejoiced in the fact that Buffalo Bill's services had been secured as scout and guide, for all knew well the man by reputation, and Don Ellwardo had at once dismissed all dread from his mind as to the perils ahead of them.

The boys, under Mora Ellwardo, had given Buffalo Bill a cheer as he rode into camp with his pard, Dart Deering, for he was their hero of heroes.

The great scout returned the salute by raising his sombrero and rode on to the headquarters tent, where Don Ellwardo was seated with his wife and daughter.

They rose as the two scouts dismounted and approached them, and camp chairs were placed for the visitors, while Mora and his comrades came as a self-imposed escort to Buffalo Bill.

Buffalo Bill introduced his friend to the Don, who at once presented him to his wife and daughter, both of whom graciously offered their hands, for they knew well the ways of the far West.

That the wondrous beauty of face and form of Idolene Ellwardo at once impressed Dart Deering Buffalo Bill saw

at a glance, for the scout appeared to be fairly fascinated with the young girl.

Having taken the camp chairs offered them, Buffalo Bill said:

"I have orders from Colonel Sumner, Don Ellwardo, which break in upon my plans, for there is a war threatening among the Northern Sioux, and my orders are to return immediately to my command."

"I am certainly very sorry to learn this, Senor Cody, as we had depended wholly upon you to be our guide and scout, but I have been a soldier myself, so know well that you must obey," and the Don glanced over the letter which Buffalo Bill had handed to him to read.

"I have not forgotten you, Don Ellwardo, as I have brought my friend, Dart Deering, to ask you to take him in my place."

"Certainly, as I know well you would recommend no one not fully capable, Senor Cody."

"You will find Mr. Deering all that you could ask, sir, in fact, he knows that country well, far better than I do, and he is a thorough scout as well, while, if I say it to his face, no braver man lives."

"A good reputation certainly, and I shall be glad to engage with Mr. Deering upon the same terms as was our arrangement."

"That will be wholly satisfactory to me, Senor Ellwardo, and I shall endeavor to serve you in every way you could wish, only please do not mister me, as I am plain Dart Deering to all."

Dart Deering made a good impression not only upon the Don, but upon his wife and daughter as well, for they saw that he was no ordinary man, and had been reared a gentleman, whatever the circumstances were that had forced him to live a wild life upon the plains.

After some further conversation, though regretting to give up Buffalo Bill, it was arranged that Dart Deering should be the scout and guide of the expedition, and he was told to report for duty within the next two days, when the wagon train would be ready to start.

The new guide and scout was then introduced to the other people of the train, after which Buffalo Bill and Dart Deering rode away from the camp together, while the boys gave them a grand send-off with cheers and a salute from their revolvers.

"Though I am sorry to lose Buffalo Bill, wife, I feel that he has brought us a good man in his place," said the Don after the scouts had left.

"I feel the same way, Don Ellwardo," was the reply, while Idolene said in a low tone:

"And yet, for the first time, I have a dread that all will not go well with us, father."

"It may be an idle fear, yet it is here, and I cannot drive it away," and she placed her hand upon her heart as she spoke.

Was it the prophecy of evil that came over her, a looking into the future?

CHAPTER III.

THE CHALLENGE.

Buffalo Bill took the trail to the northwest, to obey the orders of his General and be Chief of Scouts and Guide for the expedition against the Indians, while Dart Deering, having bidden his comrades good-bye, and given his pledge to see the Don's wagon train safely to its destination, returned to his cabin to make his arrangements for the journey.

He lived alone in his little cabin home, and when he went away at any time simply locked it up to await his return.

There was about it an air of comfort and refinement not found in frontier homes as a rule, for he had furnished it as well as was possible, and had a number of sketches and paintings upon the walls, with various curios and bric-a-brac of the far frontier.

Understanding well how to dress and tan skins, there were birds he had tax-

dermized and made as natural as life; heads of deer, bear, and other animals, with buffalo robs mats completely covering the floor.

There were books there, too, a guitar, flute, and violin, and in fact all that would add to pass away the time in so lonely a life.

Having prepared his cabin to leave it for an indefinite time, he sat down and wrote a few lines on a large sheet of paper, and placed it on the table, with the inkstand to hold it there.

This attended to, he took down his belt, saddle, and bridle, packed his saddle bags for the journey, took a couple of long lariats, a second repeating rifle, and went out and caught his two horses, both fine animals.

On one he placed the pack saddle, on the other his own saddle and bridle, and mounting started to ride away.

"I will go to the settlement and stay to-night, and get all I need for myself on the long trail," he muttered as he turned to ride off.

Suddenly he halted and glanced back at his little home.

"Strange, I feel as I do.

"I never had this same foreboding in going upon a trail that I have now, for the impression is upon me that I may never see this cabin again.

"Well, I always have lived prepared to die, and if I do pass in my chips this time, I am ready to go, and all is arranged to that end.

"Good-bye, little home," and with a wave of his hand he continued on his way.

He had a ride of some miles to the settlement, and arriving there put up for the night at the tavern.

Seeking a store he bought all the supplies he needed and got all ready for his start the next morning.

Going into the place where the denizens of the frontier settlement were wont to spend their time drinking, smoking, and gambling, he found everything a full blast.

There were over a hundred men there, many of them the roughest border characters, and to many he was known by sight, for he was a man who acknowledged few intimate friendships.

Those who knew him the best only were acquainted with the fact that he was a gold hunter nominally, but also served as scout, guide, and Indian fighter when occasion demanded.

"He was known to have had several fatal affairs, which, however, were not of his seeking, and that he was a frank-spoken man, one of nerve and a dead shot, was freely acknowledged.

Courteous to all, he yet was a mystery to all, and the only one who knew who he was in reality was said to be Buffalo Bill.

Why such a man as Dart Deering came out upon the frontier no one could fathom, for he seemed to be built for other work, though he had certainly adapted himself to circumstances.

"Pard, is you too stuck up a gent to play a game o' keards with one who are a reg'lar tough," said a rough, broad-shouldered, ugly-faced fellow approaching Dart Deering as he entered the crowded saloon.

The guide smiled pleasantly at the salutation and replied:

"I seldom play cards, and do not care to do so now."

"I hears you is ter be ther guide o' ther Mexican Don's outfit?"

"I am, though I did not know the fact was known."

"Well I knows it, and first Buf'ler Bill, and now you has kept me out o' ther job, and I tells you I expects yer to give me a chance ter git even, so I challenges yer fer three games o' keards, and ef yer hain't a coward yer'll play then with me."

After a moment of thought the reply came:

"I'll play you the three games, no more, no less."

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST GAME.

The man whose challenge was accepted by Dart Deering smiled wickedly at the reply he received.

"I fear you have made a mistake, Pard Deering, for do you not know him?" said a voice in Deering's ear.

It was the keeper of the saloon, Wash Waring.

"Oh, yes, I think I do. It is Red Rob, is it not?" replied Deering, as his challenger was looking for a table for them to play their game upon.

"It is, and about the worst piece of human cussedness in the settlement.

"He has not been here since he killed Will Wheatley four months ago.

"I'll try and get you out of it, for he has it in for you for some reason, I am sure."

"No, I'll play the three games with him."

"I am sorry.

"I can call you away on some excuse, for that man means dirt, I am certain."

"I'll play him."

"Then watch him, for God's sake."

"Thanks, I will. But I wish to find out something about him, for he made a remark that interested me," and Dart Deering lighted a cigar and walked over to the table which Red Rob had selected.

It was in a corner of the large saloon, and with an open window just behind the seat which Deering took, the other having already appropriated the one facing the other way.

"I have the keards, and its ther best two in three," said Red Rob.

"I play with no man's cards—Waring, send a fresh pack of cards here."

"That means yer believes my keards is crooked?"

"I make no charges, only a fresh pack is fair to both of us."

"Well, I hain't one to quarrel," said Red Rob, but his face showed his disappointment that his cards were not used.

"How much do you care to put on the game?" asked Deering as Waring threw an unopened pack of cards on the table.

"Big money."

"What do you call big money?"

"Is yer rich?"

"I can match the bet of any honest man out here."

"Then cover that," and Red Rob put upon the table a roll of bills, adding with an air of triumph:

"That's a cool one thousand!"

"So much?"

"Yes."

"Waring, put up three hundred for me, I have but seven with me," said Deering.

The saloon keeper produced the amount and the stakes were up.

"The best two in three takes ther pile."

"Yes."

"Dare you go higher?"

"Oh, yes, if you wish, for I think Pard Waring will back me."

"For what you wish, Mr. Deering," replied Wash Waring.

"Then make it another thou."

"All right."

The money was staked and the game begun, while the crowd became interested, as seldom had Dart Deering been seen to play.

"Say, pard, may I ask how it was Buffalo Bill kept you from being guide for the Don's train?" asked Dart Deering in an indifferent tone.

"Why, I hed offered me services, and ther Don was all right—ther was afore they got to ther present camp in ther valley, fer I came along with 'em."

"Well?"

"Then, when I went back to ther camp, ther Don said he had agreed with Buf'ler Bill ter be guide, and like a man he paid me a month's wages and said if anything prevented Buf'ler Bill from going he'd hev me."

"Buffalo Bill got orders to return to his command."

"And put yer inter ther job."

"Yes."

"That put me out ag'in."

"Well, the Don was not responsible, for Buffalo Bill had already arranged with me, and as you got a month's pay for nothing, you have no right to complain."

"I'd hev made more; but if I win now I'll be content."

"And if you do not win?"

"Then I'll just go to ther Don an' hold him to his contract."

"Was there a contract?"

"Well, I thinks so."

"I don't, for I remember the Don spoke of having some conversation with a man about being guide, but said he did not make any arrangement save with Cody."

"I says yes, and if I loses now, I guides thet train."

"Well, you have started in well to win, for the first game is yours," replied Dart Deering, as he acknowledged defeat.

"And I gits ther pile, an' has a cool one thousand ter say so."

"I take that additional bet," replied the guide calmly.

CHAPTER V.

THE LAST GAME.

There was no doubt that Red Rob had won the game and fairly.

This much Wash Waring admitted, and he had watched the game closely.

"Your were too indifferent, fer several good plays slipped by you unnoticed, and he had no chance to cheat," he whispered as he bent over Dart Deering.

"I was thinking of something else," responded the guide, and the cards were shuffled, dealt, and the second game was begun.

Though he looked wholly indifferent, Dart Deering yet played now with caution, and in silence.

"I wish you gents wu'd stand aside, so as I kin git a breath o' air from that window," said Red Rob impatiently, and the crowd standing behind Dart Deering moved to one side.

But in their interest in the game, they soon crowded behind the guide again, until Red Rob said angrily:

"See here, gents, I has a way of shooting out of windows jist fer fun, an' ef any of yere gits inter range with my bullets he'll tarn up his toes, never fear."

The crowd scattered from behind the guide with alacrity, for Red Rob was known to be a man of no idle threats.

Hardly had they done so, when to give them a hint not to repeat the offense, Red Rob took out a revolver and fired:

"I'll jist hold this money down with my gun, so as ter hev it handy."

Dart Deering made no reply.

He showed no annoyance at the words or act of his card partner, and smiled when the crowd broke away with haste.

A moment after Dart Deering threw his last card down with the remark:

"That makes us even, so far, for I win this game."

There was a slight murmur of satisfaction from the crowd, but an ugly glance from Red Rob silenced it.

"Yas; one is one and —," he said hoarsely.

Then interest in the game was now intense, and Red Rob's hands had a quiver in them as he shuffled and dealt.

But Dart Deering was as cool as an icicle, and merely lighted a fresh cigar.

He had kept his eye on his opponent, however, and gave him no chance to deal unfairly.

"It's your money or mine, this game," growled Red Rob.

"Oh, yes; for that was the compact. Three games only, and best two in three, the winner to take the stakes."

"And, with this side bet, stand ter win a cool twenty-five hundred."

"Yes."

"It'll be my money."

"The game will tell, not talk."

Red Rob dropped his hand carelessly upon his revolver, lying upon the money, and his act stampeded the crowd, who were again filling the space behind the guide, and closing the window.

With a rude laugh, he said:

"I sees yer remembers, Pard, and it are well yer does."

Dart Deering calmly marked and watched the game.

Each man played with the greatest caution, for there was a big sum at stake. Far more than was usual in that settlement.

Several months before Red Rob had played with a young man, and then killed him, just why the crowd never knew.

He was then known to have very little money, and so all were surprised to see him return after a long absence and possess thousands.

They did not understand it, did not know where he had been, yet were glad when he was gone, and sorry at his return, for he was feared, not liked, in the settlement.

With his revolver lying ready upon the table now they all feared there would be some trouble, so a feeling of anxiety rested upon each one, especially Wash Waring, who had a warm friendship for Dart Deering, whose extra money he had in keeping in his strong box.

The third game was played amid a dead silence, a silence that was painful, and when the last cards were thrown upon the table a deep curse broke from the lips of Red Rob, while Dart Deering said quietly:

"I have won."

With the words he laid his hand quickly upon Red Rob's revolver, and the money, and continued:

"This is a handsome weapon you carry, Pard."

The smile upon his face was in strange contrast to the scowl that added to Red Rob's ugly looks, for if he had intended to play a double game he had been thwarted by Deering's cool and clever act.

CHAPTER VI.

A SHOT IN THE DARK.

There was not a man in that crowd but felt that Red Rob had been beaten at his own game.

They were assured that Red Rob had placed his revolver upon the pile of money, not to hold it down, or to have it ready for the onlookers, should they again crowd before the window, but to have it within reach should Dart Deering win the game.

By his clever act Dart Deering had doubtless saved his own life, kept his winnings and had Red Rob at his mercy.

That at least was Wash Waring's belief, and many agreed with him.

So quickly had the scout's hand dropped upon the revolver on the table, so rapidly its muzzle had pointed directly at Red Rob, who realized that he had been caught in his own trap, and lost his money as well, that he could do nothing but scowl and swear.

But his eyes were eagerly gazing out of the window, for the way was open now, and all saw that he seemed to be looking out into the darkness as though he expected to see some one.

Dart Deering had just thrust the money into his shirt pocket, still grasping Red Rob's revolver with one hand, and apparently admiring the weapon though keeping an eye upon the desperado, when suddenly one of the crowd nearest the window shouted: "Look out, Deering!"

At the cry a man suddenly stepped behind Dart Deering, just as a light flash and report came from outside the window.

With a groan and spring into the air the man dropped dead just behind Deering's chair, he having evidently received the bullet intended for the scout.

"I saw the man, and his gun was leveled at you."

"That is why I called to you to look out, Deering," cried the man who had uttered the warning call.

Dart Deering had sprung to his feet, while the crowd scattered right and left, evidently expecting more shots from out in the darkness.

"I'll find him, fellers," shouted Red Rob, and with a bound he leaped clear through the open window, leaving his revolver in the hands of Dart Deering.

For an instant none seemed to realize the cause of Red Rob's lightning-like exit, and then Wash Waring called out:

"He has escaped, pards! He'll not show up here again, for he intended to kill you, Deering, or have his pard outside to do it."

"A hundred to one that was his game, pards."

No one took the bet, but Dart Deering quickly leaped through the window, revolver in hand, Wash Waring and several others following him.

"Hark!"

It was Deering who uttered the word.

It was so dark that at first no one could see, coming out of the brilliantly lighted saloon, and told to listen by Dart Deering they did so.

Distinctly to their ears came the sound of hoofs rapidly retreating out of the settlement.

"There are two horses," said Wash Waring.

"Yes; Red Rob and his pard."

"I am sure you were right, Waring, and that he did intend to kill me, or have his pard outside to do it."

"Yes; that's why he chose that table and was so anxious to have clear space behind you from the window."

"That's so, Wash," cried the crowd.

"You should not have taken that seat, Deering," said Wash Waring.

"I should have been more cautious, I admit; but I did not expect to have to deal with an assassin without, only a desperado within doors."

"I wish I had followed him more quickly and had a horse at hand to pursue, but let him go, for you can barely hear the hoof strokes now."

"Another time you may meet, Dart."

"Yes, Wash; but now let us go in and see about that poor fellow who got the bullet intended for me."

They re-entered the saloon and found the crowd had resumed their games, drinking and talking, a few having gathered about the dead body of the man who had fallen at the shot fired from out in the darkness.

"Poor fellow, I recognize him as an unfortunate with whom life went wrong."

"Have him decently buried, Waring, at my expense, and if you can find that he had any relatives and they are poor, send them a few hundred for me," said Deering, and the crowd cheered his generosity.

As he was about to leave the saloon a man suddenly confronted him and called out in a voice that all could hear:

"Hold on there, Dart Deering!"

"Well, what is it?" quietly asked the scout as he halted a few paces from the man, upon whom the gaze of all in the room now rested.

CHAPTER VII.

HELD TO ACCOUNT.

"Well, sir?" again asked Dart Deering, as he saw that the man who had halted him made no reply.

"You know me, I believe, Dart Deering, don't yer?"

"I have seen you often, and I believe they call you Quick Shot Kit."

"They does, and I is well called."

"Tell me what you wish with me."

"You knows me, I says."

"By sight and name only, and I am not anxious to encourage any further acquaintance," and it was evident that Dart Deering was becoming impatient.

"Well, we is goin' to git better acquainted, and right quick, too."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh! I knows you is game, and it's that kind I loves to tackle, for I hates a coward."

"Well?"

There was no sound of voices now, all was silence in the room, as silent as the dead form that lay over on a bench under the window, through which had come the shot that had ended his life.

"I wants ter say this, and that is Red Rob may be a leetle rough in his ways, but he once risked his life to save mine, and I wants ter pay him for it."

"Shall I lend you the money because I won it from him?"

"No. I has money ter burn."

"What then?"

"I don't mean to pay in gold fer a life."

"Pray explain what you do mean, for I have no time to throw away just now."

"Well, you has got ter hear me."

"If you are seeking a quarrel with me I'd rather hear the sound of our revolvers than our voices."

"That'll come in time, but I wants ter know if you said, as were jist now told me, that Red Rob had intended ter kill you and save his money?"

"I said that he intended to have me shot in the back by an assassin, and save his money. Is that satisfactory?"

"It's flat-footed and no mistake."

"Well, talk quick, or act, for I am in a hurry."

"I'll act in time, but talk now."

"All right."

"As Red Rob saved my life and he hain't here, I'll jist say I demands an apology from yer fer that insult."

"You'll not get it any more than he would if he was here."

"Then I calls fer satisfaction."

"What will you consider satisfaction?"

"A fight to the death atween us," was the fierce rejoinder of Quick Shot Kit.

"I am sorry you think you have to take up for your cowardly and rough pard, for I have no time to waste or inclination to meet every desperado who wishes to call me to account for my actions."

"Well, I does it."

"Which means that I've got to fight you?"

"It do."

"Just select your second and let us have it out," was the cool rejoinder of the scout, and then turning to Wash Waring, who was standing conveniently near, he added:

"Will you act for me, pard?"

"Certainly, Deering, though I must tell Quick Shot Kit that he is making a great mistake in taking up the quarrel of such a fellow as Red Rob, who will not dare show his face in this settlement again, for if he does he will have to answer to those who do not believe in assassination, no matter how rough a fair stand up fight may be here."

"I doesn't ask you for your advice, Wash Waring," growled Quick Shot Kit.

"No, but you got it all the same, and had better profit by it."

"I does as I pleases, and if Dart Deering hain't no coward he'll meet me."

"Oh, certainly; when, where, and with whatever weapons you may please," said Dart Deering, indignantly.

"I lives or dies by ther revolver."

"All right, one is as good as another to me—please name your second, for Mr. Waring will serve me."

"Sam Selden is my man," and he referred to a tall, serious-faced man in miner's garb, who said:

"As you ask it, Quick Shot Kit, I'll not go back on you, but I do not like to be mixed up in any quarrels on my own account, let alone for one I hardly know."

This was a setback for Quick Shot Kit, but he said:

"But I asks you to sarve me."

"Which I will do, but it's got to be a

fair and square fight on your part, as I know it will be on Deering's," and he walked over to where Wash Waring stood to arrange for the deed, while all eyes were turned upon Quick Shot Kit, many wondering why he had chosen Sam Selden for his second, for the latter was not one of the tough element of the settlement.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MIDNIGHT DUEL.

There were many present who not only wondered why Quick Shot Kit had selected Sam Selden for his second, but also why he had chosen to pick a quarrel with Dart Deering, a man by no means to be trifled with.

But he had done so for some reason, and then asked one not of his kind to second him.

"Neither Deering or Selden are men who trot in the same class with Red Rob, and he's got some reason for what he does that I cannot see into," said a sport, and he added:

"I've got five to one in money that says Deering kills him if it's a square fight."

"I takes that bet," said a rough-looking man, and the gambler, who was known as Odds, the Sport, as he always offered big odds on all bets he made, replied:

"I say, then, two fifty to fifty."

"If you've got the money."

"I has it," and the money was produced and the stakes placed in the hands of Wash Waring.

Other bets were made, some with odds, and they were about equal as to Dart Deering and Quick Shot Kit being the victor.

In the meantime Sam Selden and Wash Waring had been talking together, and allk new that the fight would be a square one.

They had agreed that the two men should stand across the saloon, their faces to the wall, armed with but one weapon each, a revolver.

This weapon was to be in their belt, and at the word the men were to turn about, draw their revolvers, and advance, firing upon each other.

A gold piece was tossed into the air and Sam Selden won the word.

Each second then placed his man, while the crowd ranged alongon each side of the room, leaving an open space between.

The seconds took their stands midway between the duelists and facing each other.

"Any last words, Dart, for you know that fellow is quick and shoots to kill?" Wash Waring had asked the scout.

"No, thank you, Wash, for I always live prepared to go."

"I left a note in my cabin on the table, and you will find a letter in the things you have in your strong box in keeping for me," was the quiet answer.

"Heaven help you, old pard," and Wash Waring went to his post.

Sam Selden had also asked Quick Shot Kit if he had any last word for any one in case he should be killed.

The answer was:

"Don't be a fool, pard, for I hain't no suicide."

"I knows what I is doin', and yer bet I hain't goin' under."

The two men stood with their faces to the log wall of the cabin, awaiting the word from Sam Selden.

The crowd was silent and expectant, and many of them were most anxious to see the duel.

At last the silence was broken by Sam Selden's voice:

"You know the word, pards, and if either man does different, if it's you, Deering, I'll shoot you dead, and if you are the one, Quick Shot Kit, Wash Waring will drop you where you stand."

"I know my biz," called out Quick Shot Kit, taking his pipe from between his lips to speak, and which he had care-

fully filled and lighted with an air of bravado.

"I understand," answered Dart Deering, pleasantly. A moment of silence, and then came the words from Sam Selden's lips:

"Ready—turn—draw—fire!"

Each man wheeled as though on a pivot, and the revolvers flashed together.

At the flash Quick Shot Kit dropped upon his knees; all supposed wounded, save those nearest to him, and they saw that it was a dodge, for they beheld the splinters fly from the log just where his head would have been had he remained standing.

Wash Waring also seemed to feel that he was wounded, for he did not carry out the compact agreed upon and shoot him down.

The bullet from Quick Shot Kit's revolver struck the heavy gold buckle of Deering's belt squarely in the centre and imbedded itself there, a fatal shot, indeed, had it not thus been checked.

The shock caused Dart Deering to stagger backward a couple of steps, and Quick Shot Kit fired a second time, the bullet just clipping the cheek of the scout.

But the latter fired his second shot at the same instant, and downward, for Quick Shot Kit was still on his knees, and a howl of pain and rage broke from the lips of the desperado as his hand dropped to his side shattered, and his revolver fell upon the floor.

But, with the quickness of action which had gained for him his name, he seized the weapon in his left hand and brought it to a level, just as Dart Deering fired a third time.

Again there came a howl of fury and pain commingled, and the left hand fell shattered to his side, while Dart Deering called out:

"I do not care for your life, Quick Shot—take it!"

At that instant there came a shot through the open door and Dart Deering dropped to the floor his full length, while in the midst of the excitement a second shot was heard without, and then into the saloon came the tall form of Buffalo Bill, dragging a dead body after him.

CHAPTER IX.

BUFFALO BILL'S RETURN.

The scene of wild excitement that followed the two shots of Dart Deering, putting Quick Shot Kit out of the fight by shattering his hands, and then giving him his life most generously after his treachery, were suddenly quieted by the reports ringing outside of the saloon twice in rapid succession, the fall of the scout, and sudden appearance of Buffalo Bill.

All knew the great plainsman by sight, and every eye was upon him as he strode into the saloon, a revolver in one hand and the other grasping the collar of a limp form as he dragged it a few paces and then dropped it upon the dirt floor.

Standing erect, his handsome face grave, his piercing eyes ablaze with some emotion that deeply roused him, Buffalo Bill was silent for a few seconds, unmindful of the gazing crowd.

Then in a deep voice he cried, touching with his foot the body he had dragged into the saloon:

"It has been the rule of my life to deal with a cowardly assassin as I would with a mad wolf, and hence I killed this man, as I saw him standing in the darkness in safety, pull trigger upon one here in the broad glare of light—one I recognized as my friend, Dart Deering, and I hold myself responsible for my act."

A moment's silence followed the words of Buffalo Bill, and then it was broken by a ringing cheer that came as from one man, telling him that his bold act was heartily approved, if not by all, at least by the majority of those present.

"You did perfectly right, Buffalo Bill,

to kill that fellow, and a bad one he was, too, as we all know him, and he was one of Red Rob's boon companions," said Wash Waring, and he added:

"But we thought you had gone to the northward?"

"I started, but met a courier with dispatches to go from here by the morning's stage southward, and, as his horse had gone lame, turned back to bring the papers and get him a fresh mount, but I must be off soon."

"It was as I rode up that I saw that man drawing a bead upon Dart Deering, whom I recognized as the one he intended to kill, and I had just time to draw and we fired almost together."

"Had I been a second quicker I would have saved my poor pard's life."

"I'm not so dead as you think, Pard Bill," came from the lips of Dart Deering, and with an effort he rose from the floor, amid a wild hurrah from the crowd, for the gold hunter was a very popular man in the settlement, which was known as Advance City.

Buffalo Bill sprang forward and grasped Deering's hand warmly, while he looked with professional eyes upon the cut across his left temple, where the bullet of the intended assassin cut its way.

Pressing the wound, he said:

"It was a narrow escape, Dart, but did not hurt the bone, though it stunned you with the shock."

"Doctor Wash Waring here will soon dress it for you, but I see he has another patient on his hands just now," and the scout glanced over at Quick Shot Kit, who had uttered no word of complaint thus far, but had stood with his bleeding hands held out, awaiting the result of Buffalo Bill's coming and his adversary's fall, as he had believed, dead.

But Dart Deering's first thought had been of the man he had wounded, and he had called to Wash Waring:

"See to that poor fellow, Wash, for he's suffering greatly."

Quick Shot Kit had heard the words of his generous foe, and stepping forward held out his bleeding right hand, while he said earnestly:

"Your bullet smashed it, Pard Deering, and t'other one, too, but I offers it to you and thanks you, too, fer not killin' me."

"Don't be afeerd ter squeeze it, fer I kin stand ther pain."

Dart Deering did grasp the wounded hand, but not to squeeze it, only to examine the wound, and replied:

"It's not as bad as I feared, Kit, for only the bone of the middle finger is broken, and I hope the other hand is no worse, but Doctor Wash will soon have you all right."

"Yes, he's as good a doctor as he is a landlord, but I said I thanked you for savin' my life, Pard Deering, and when I says thet I means it."

"I never kill a man if it is to be avoided, Kit, and I am glad your life is not on my hands."

"If I can do anything for you tell Wash Waring, and he'll fix you all right."

"Thankee again, but you has got a bullet tear along your temple that needs lookin' arter."

"A mere scratch."

"I'll be in the tavern, Wash, when you want me," and Dart Deering stepped to the side of Buffalo Bill, and the two left the room together.

Going to Dart Deering's room Buffalo Bill heard the story of all that had happened, and listening attentively, said:

"You must keep your eye on that fellow, Red Rob, Dart, for he is one of the worst men in these parts, and, though he may not dare to come back to Advance City for some time, it will give him more leisure to follow your trail, and he will do it, I fear, to kill you and then lead the Ellwardo wagon train into trouble, for he means mischief, I am convinced, and his having allies to-night shows that he is not alone in his work."

"No, he had pards, that is certain,

and I will be on the watch for his deviltry, but what brought you back, Bill?"

"I will tell you," and Buffalo Bill spoke with a seriousness that impressed Dart Deering.

CHAPTER X.

WHY BUFFALO BILL CAME BACK.

"I came back for two reasons, Dart, one of which I made known in the saloon, only you were lying stunned just then and did not hear it," said Cody.

"No, and it was a surprise to see you, I assure you."

"Well, I met an army courier coming on the trail to Advance City, and bearing important dispatches to be sent south on the stage that leaves here at day-break.

"His horse was very lame, and he could not reach here, so I told him I would put back, send his dispatches, and get him a good horse and some supplies, and, knowing me, he gave me his leather bag, and I returned."

"And just in time to save my life."

"No the fellow fired just a second sooner than I did, but I saw who he aimed at and let him have a shot.

"But his aim was true, though the bullet glanced."

"You avenged me, at least."

"Yes, and my conscience does not disturb me much, as that was a mighty bad customer, though I hate to speak ill of the dead.

"Still, I know that he has deserved hanging for a dozen crimes."

"Yes, I can vouch for that, Pard Bill."

"Now to my other motive for returning."

"Yes."

"I crossed a trail just before sunset that I did not like."

"Ah! Indians?"

"No. There were seven horses, all shod, and five of them had riders.

"I followed it, for it was very fresh, and soon came in sight of the gang.

"There were five men and two pack animals, and they turned into the trail running toward Flagstaff."

"I see."

"To me that looked bad, for I decided that it was a party going to hover about the Ellwardo wagon train."

"No doubt of it."

"I am under urgent orders, as you know, so could not follow the men, but decided to come back with all haste to Advance City and warn you."

"Just like you, Bill."

"As I came back into my old trail I met the army courier, and that gave me still further reason for returning, as his horse was used up, so I left him in camp and back I came; but I must not delay long, as I will get a horse from Wash Waring for the courier, and go back at once.

"But you will see to those five fellows, Dart?"

"Indeed I will, Bill."

"And then you will have Red Rob to look after, also, for after what you told me of his being determined to be the guide of the Don's train, I am sure he will give you trouble, in fact, may have already arranged to do so, and those five men I saw may be his gang."

"They may, Bill, and he certainly had others here to help him, for he was not alone when he rode away to-night."

"And that fellow I shot was, no doubt, one of his band."

"Yes, but he is no longer dangerous."

"Nor is Quick Shot Kit, Dart."

"Not now, at least, Pard Bill."

Just then Wash Waring entered the room, and said:

"Well, Dart, your bullet broke the bone of the middle finger of each hand, showing just where you aimed, and I have dressed them as well as I could, and think they will not give him a great deal of trouble."

"That means that you have dressed the wounds most skillfully, Wash, for, though you do not claim to be a doctor or surgeon, you certainly are both."

"I studied medicine and surgery, but a few weeks before I would have received my diploma a circumstance happened that changed my whole life, and—made me the outcast I now am."

He spoke with a depth of feeling, a pathos, that touched both of his hearers deeply, and showed them that he had a skeleton in his breast.

But Buffalo Bill said in his cheery way:

"You are in the swim with the thousands of others, pard, while they came here for the good of the community they left, and I'll stake my life you never knowingly did a wrong act, so don't begin now and cheat me in a horse trade, for I've got to buy a horse from you in the dark."

Wash Waring laughed and replied:

"You shall have the pick of the outfit, Bill."

"Well, get me out one and name your price, for I must be off within the hour."

Within the time named Buffalo Bill mounted his horse and with the animal for the courier in lead started once more on his trail to the northward, Dart Deering seeing him ride away in the darkness and muttering:

"There goes one of Nature's noblemen, a man to tie to for life or death; but when shall we meet again, I wonder, and where, and under what circumstances?"

CHAPTER XI.

DART DEERING'S DISCOVERY.

Dart Deering arose late the morning after the tragedies in the Good Luck Saloon, and which had so nearly proved fatal to him.

After the departure of Deering and Cody, followed soon after by Quick Shot Kit and Wash Waring, the gambling, drinking, and talking went on as before, the men there unmindful of the two dead bodies lying in their midst, awaiting burial on the morrow.

The denizens of Advance City were too used to scenes of death, to sudden tragedies, to dwell long upon them once they had passed over, and all present went on with their occupations at the time of the interruption.

When he had bidden Buffalo Bill goodbye, Dart Deering, whose wound had been dressed by Wash Waring, returned to his room in the Good Cheer Inn and was soon fast asleep.

He was one of those natures that did not allow work and trouble to keep him awake.

When he awoke he found a good breakfast ready for him, a buffalo steak, some hominy, bacon, and a cup of coffee.

"So you leave us to-day, Dart?" said Wash Waring, who just came in to his breakfast.

"No, I will not go for a day or two, so will be back to-night."

"I am glad of it."

"The fact is, Wash, I wish to look around to-day and to-night, for Buffalo Bill put me on a trail last night that I must keep my eye upon."

"I felt he had a double motive in coming back, when he was under hurry orders, Dart, but can I help you?"

"Yes, and I'll tell you what I want."

Having told Wash Waring of the trail Buffalo Bill had come upon and followed, Dart Deering continued:

"Now, I would like you to find out, as I know you can do, just what five men are missing from Advance City, and also how many allies Red Rob has here?"

"I can do it, I think, for I will tell you, Dart, that, for reasons of my own, I am doing detective work here, and have in my employ several clever allies, and will put them on this work for you."

"Good! That means that you will find out, and it is important to me to know, as I believe the gang, whoever they are, and whether under the leadership of Red Rob or not, mean mischief to the wagon train I intend to guide out into Arizona."

"It must be prevented, then, by all means, Dart, and I'll find out all I can for you and let you know to-night."

"Thank you, and I will ride down to the wagon trail to-day and tell Don Ellwardo that I would prefer he should delay pulling out until day after to-morrow, as it will give me a better chance to find out and thwart any plot on hand against him."

"Yes, for if there is one we will know by to-morrow."

"And I can leave here to-morrow night and pull out the next morning by another trail if those fellows have gone ahead to lie in wait for us."

"Well, Dart, with you as guide, I feel little anxiety about the wagon train, but I'll do all I can to ferret out if any dirty work is intended, and just who it is that is about it."

Leaving his pack horse in the stable of the Good Cheer Inn, Dart Deering mounted his saddle animal and set out for the camp of the wagon train.

It was a ride of a score of miles, and he had gone four-fifths of the distance when, as he was nearing the top of a small ridge over which the trail wound, he heard the rapid clatter of hoofs.

The impulse of most men would have been to spur on the few yards to the top and see who was approaching at such breakneck speed.

But with Dart Deering it was different.

He was too thorough a plainsman to make a mistake of that kind.

His keen ears had detected that the hoofs were coming toward him along the trail.

And more, he had discovered another sound of other hoofs approaching, also.

But his ears were tuned up to a pitch that told him the other hoofs were further off than those he had just heard, and more, that they were doubtless in pursuit of the one who was near at hand.

In an instant he had leaped from his saddle, called to his horse to stand where he left him, and, rifle in hand, ran to the top of the ridge, taking advantage of a small bush growing on the side of the trail to hide him.

Peeking over he beheld five horses coming on at full speed, one a hundred yards in advance of the others.

Upon the one horse in the lead was a woman, and she was urging her horse hard.

CHAPTER XII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

It did not take Dart Deering an instant to prepare to stand at bay.

Odds of four to one against him he counted as nothing when a woman was flying for life from four desperadoes.

That they were a hard lot a glance revealed, and they were urging their horses on at their utmost speed, while one shouted savagely:

"Halt, thar, Miss, or I'll drop that horse under yer!"

The fugitive paid no heed to the fierce threat, but let her whip fall heavily upon the flanks of her horse, which Dart Deering now saw was going lame, so would be run down by those in pursuit.

Shielded by the bush, the guide quickly brought his rifle to his shoulder.

He had recognized the fair fugitive as Idolene Ellwardo, the Don's daughter.

This nerved him to the determination to die right there if need be in her defense.

On came her flying horse, up the hill, each bound growing more and more crippled.

The face of the girl was flushed with excitement and exercise, but every feature was set with determination.

Dart Deering saw her glance backward to observe her four pursuers, and then still heavier lay the lash on the steaming horse.

There was one man well in advance of the others, the latter being huddled together, and all rushing on as though sure of their prey.

"I'll pick him off," muttered Deering.

All this had not taken a quarter of a minute of time, since the guide discovered the situation, and was ready to play the part of the friend in need.

"Dash right by me, Miss Ellwardo, mount my horse, and be ready to continue your flight if aught befalls me."

The words were quickly and distinctly spoken as Idolene neared the summit of the little ridge, but they reached her ears.

Her lips parted in a slight exclamation, she half drew rein, saw the crouching form, and recognizing the guide, urged her horse on over the top of the ridge.

As she did so, Dart Deering fired his first shot.

It was at the man in the lead.

The form reeled in the saddle, the hands went upward, clutching wildly at the air, and then the body fell with a crashing thud on the rocky trail.

The other three men stopped with amazing suddenness, while quickly they fired their rifles at the top of the ridge, but at random.

Unhurt by their fire, Dart Deering again pulled trigger, this time at one of the horsemen whom he recognized.

It was no less than Red Rob, his adversary at cards of the night before.

As the guide fired Red Rob's horse threw up his head under a severe yank on his bit and the bullet went crashing into the animal's skull.

This saved Red Rob's life, for it was a line shot for his heart.

Down went the horse in his tracks, while Red Rob nimbly caught on his feet, and grasped the rein of the animal from whose saddle had fallen the first victim of the guide's unerring aim.

The animal, relieved of his rider, had wheeled and trotted back to the group.

With a yell of fury and a bound Red Rob threw himself into the saddle and uttering fierce curses at his companions as cowards for deserting him, for they were already in swift flight, he followed them with a speed that threatened to soon overtake them, as he had then the swiftest of the horses.

As he ran, he lay low in his saddle to avoid another shot, but not low enough not to feel the sting of a bullet that just scratched his shoulder.

Dart Deering was now standing out in full relief upon the top of the ridge.

He no longer sought cover, for he had won the fight.

A dead man and horse lay in the trail two hundred feet away, and the three other men were in full flight.

"I shall not forget you, Red Rob," he muttered, and he half raised his rifle again, as though to fire another shot.

"No, I'll not fire again, for they are no longer dangerous," he muttered, lowering his rifle.

Just then he started as a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and he turned to behold Idolene Ellwardo standing by his side, and looking very beautiful, with her wealth of hair hanging far down her back, her face flushed, and with one hand holding her riding habit, the other a revolver, for she had come to his aid.

CHAPTER XIII.

DIVIDED WAYS.

"Why, Miss Ellwardo, I supposed you were far away!" said the guide with a look of surprise upon his handsome face.

"Oh, no; your advice was well meant, but I am not of the blood to desert one who risks his life for my sake.

"I came back to help you, for I supposed these men would fight."

"No, they did not know I was alone—but you are a brave and noble girl," blurted out Deering, impulsively.

Idolene flushed, but said simply:

"Thank you, and it seems I found a brave and noble man for a friend in need."

"How was it those men found you?" quickly asked the guide.

"I was out for a ride alone and came

upon them, though I believe they were watching me.

"Cut off from camp by them, I came this trail, as I supposed it led to Advance City."

"It does."

"My horse could have easily outfooted theirs, but picked up a stone in his shoe and went lame, and, as you can understand, I had no time to dismount and take it out," and she smiled.

"Hardly, just then," dryly returned Deering.

"So I forced my horse on, but was giving up hope when I heard your words and saw you.

"But I had my revolver; if caught, to use on those men—or myself!"

Deering saw by her face that she meant her significant words, and he said:

"I wanted you to mount my horse and go on."

"Just what I would not do, sir."

"So I discovered, Miss."

"But I'll see to your horse now."

The fine animal was standing down the hill near the guide's horse, and one fore foot was upraised as though he was suffering.

Wedge into the iron shoe was a stone, which, with some difficulty, Deering removed and remarked:

"He has doubtless bruised his hoof some, but I think will not be very lame."

"Now shall I escort you to your camp?"

"Were you going there?"

"Yes, Miss, but I would rather say to you what I intended to tell your father, while I take the trail of those fellows and see just where they have made for."

"Certainly."

"But you do not also intend to give up your position as our guide, as Buffalo Bill was forced to do?" asked Idolene with some show of anxiety in look and tone.

"Oh, no, Miss Ellwardo; I am the more determined to go."

"But I wish to see what I can find out about those three fellows, and on my way back will carry that body into Advance City for burial."

"Oh, yes; you killed one of them?"

"It was the man in the lead."

"Yes, I saw him fall from his saddle—it was terrible; but I think you wounded that heavily-bearded man whose horse you shot, for I saw him grasp his shoulder as you fired."

"Yes, and I recognized him."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, he goes by the name of Red Rob, and is a very tough citizen as I happen to well know, for I had a game of cards with him in the Good Luck Saloon last night."

"You play cards with such a man, Mr. Deering?" and there was a look of surprise in Idolene's face.

"I did so to oblige him, Miss Ellwardo, for it was a challenge I could not refuse. But allow me to aid you to your saddle, and I will put you on the right trail to camp, which is only some three miles from here."

She was surprised at the ease with which he raised her to her saddle, and then saw him mount and lead the way down the trail the way she had come.

He watched her horse closely and said:

"Your horse is only the least bit lame, I see."

"Yes," and Idolene gazed down upon the body by which the guide had halted and dismounted.

Turning it over a face cut and bruised by the fall was revealed, as well as the marks of the bullet in the very centre of the forehead.

"I will lift the body into the limbs of yonder tree, to keep it from the wolves until my return," and the guide did so, also taking the saddle and bridle from the dead horse of Red Rob and the weapons were also placed by the tree.

"Now, Miss Ellwardo, if you will say to your father, please, that I will report to-morrow night, instead of to-night,

for reasons I will explain to him, it will allow me to go on the trail of those three men, as I deem it best to do."

"I will, sir," and soon after leaving Idolene on the direct trail to her camp, Dart Deering went off at a gallop on the track of Red Rob and his companions.

CHAPTER XIV.

TO BE DREADED.

Red Rob and his two comrades had disappeared at a rush.

They had received a lesson in the death of one of their number, and, though the wound in Red Rob's shoulder was a mere scratch to such a man as he, used to the hardest knocks, it was a reminder how close had been his call.

If not deserted by his two comrades Red Rob would have stopped and faced the one man he saw against them, for he had recognized who his foe was.

But when the other two, also recognizing the guide, fled and left him alone, Red Rob followed with a strong desire to escape from the aim of a man whom he knew but too well.

He had hoped that the guide did not recognize him, however, and only wanted to put as much space as possible between them in as quick a time as it could be done.

They had been hovering about the camp of Don Ellwardo and watching to see just what was going to be done.

After his experience of the night before with the guide, Red Rob did not dare to risk going into the camp.

But he was not alone in his determination to track that wagon train out in the further west.

He had allies, and a number of them.

And more, Red Rob was not the leader of the wild band, but one other was who remained in concealment as such, and unknown.

Red Rob was but an officer, obeying orders, and his leader was a man to fear, not one to trifle with.

Reconnoitring the camp of the wagon train, he had seen Idolene Ellwardo ride away from it alone.

Instantly he intended to attempt her capture, and thus gain favor in the eyes of his secret chief.

He and his three comrades at once followed her.

They waited until she came to a part of the country where they could cut her off from her camp, and force her to run for it to Advance City, or get bewildered on some of the trails.

They did not doubt but that their horses could outfoot the animal ridden by Idolene.

Gaining upon her unseen they came within pistol shot before she was started by her horse suddenly showing a desire to run.

Glancing back she saw the four men almost up with her, and hitherto concealed by thick timber, while the rustle of her horse's hoofs in the leaves had prevented her from hearing their approach.

At once she had started in flight, when Red Rob had shouted:

"Hold on, thar, Miss, fer we has a message fer yer!"

Then, as she did not heed the call, came:

"Halt, Miss, or we'll kill yer horse!"

Away she went and her pursuers after her.

Red Rob would not fire on the horse, for under no circumstances dare he risk harming her.

But Idolene did not know that he would have had his secret leader to deal with had he done so.

Her horse was very fleet of hoof and readily began to drop his pursuers, greatly to their rage and disappointment.

Then he picked up the stone with his shoe and began to go lame.

The result is known to the reader of how her pursuers gained on her crippled horse, only to be checked in the moment of apparent success.

Having failed to capture their prize and lost one of their number, the rough gang were anxious to put space between themselves and Dart Deering.

They sped along at the top speed of their horses and kept the pace for miles.

They crossed a plain several miles in width, and made for the shelter of a mountain range on the further side, into which the trail they had turned into lead.

It was this trail that the Don's wagon train must take on its way to Arizona.

Following the trail to the edge of the plain, Dart Deering brought his field glass to his eyes and saw the three fugitives just entering the shelter of the distant mountains.

"That tells me what I would know, for we will have them to deal with further on the trail.

"Did I follow further they would see me and know that I suspected their intention, while in shelter, and I on the open plain, they would hold me at a disadvantage.

"I will return to Advance City and tell Wash Waring what has happened and see if he has made any discoveries."

With this Dart Deering turned back on the trail.

CHAPTER XV.

A SHOT THAT COUNTED.

The sun was just setting when Dart Deering made his way into Advance City on foot, while his horse followed close behind him with the body of the dead pard of Red Rob tied in the saddle and the saddles and bridle and weapons also a part of his load.

A group at the Good Cheer Inn gazed curiously at Deering as he approached, while Wash Waring, coming out on the rude piazza, called out:

"What's been to pay this time, Pard Deering?"

"Do you know him, Wash?"

"I certainly do, and he's better dead than alive. I don't care who says to the contrary."

There was a laugh at this, and several of the group agreed with the landlord of the Good Cheer Inn in his rather curt and severe obituary of the dead.

"How was it, pard?" asked several of the crowd in a breath, addressing the guide.

"Well, I caught him in bad company, with three others, chasing a young girl belonging to a wagon train camped on the lower trail, and, as they were threatening to kill her horse to capture her, I chipped in and this fellow gave up the chase, the others running away when they had to face a man instead of a woman.

"I brought him in to report, Wash, and bury him at my expense."

"You did right, Deering, and have cut off another tough one in the midst of his deviltry, and, as I am magistrate of Advance City I absolve you from all blame for the killing," said Wash Waring, who, in addition to being landlord of the Good Cheer Inn, boss of the Good Luck Saloon, acting medicine man and surgeon of the settlement, and proprietor of the best store there, had also been made magistrate to represent the law in that lawless community as near as it was possible to be done.

But Wash Waring had nerve and it took just such a man to deal with the material of such a community, made up of the odds and ends of humanity from the world over.

"Does yer not give him a trial, Boss Waring?" asked a man of the group, and one who had villain stamped on every feature of his face.

"I have tried Mr. Deering and rendered my verdict," was the quiet answer.

"On what evidence?"

"Deering's."

"I demands justice and ter git it we must hev ther girl as a witness and them fellers Deering says ran away from him."

"I accept Dart Deering's statement as the true one, and will not bring a young girl into this camp, while to find those who were pursuing her to have them testify would be impossible, I am sure."

"Well, I demands it."

"This man was a friend of yours, I believe, Dave Scully?"

"He were my best pard."

"Well, I am sorry for the company you kept, for we all know Tot Dent was as bad as they make 'em."

"He was human, and he hev been murdered, so I says that Dart Deering hes got ter stand trial."

"I have decided, and that goes, Dave Scully."

"It don't go with me."

"All right, chip right in, Scully, in any way you like, for I'll meet you," was Wash Waring's response.

"I'll do it, sir, in ther way you won't like," and Dave Scully turned to walk away, as though he had decided upon some plan of action against Waring, but wanted backers in what he intended to do.

Wash Waring laughed at his words that were an implied threat and turned also to re-enter his tavern.

Then the trick of the man was revealed, for, quick as a flash, he wheeled, having gotten Wash Waring off his guard.

His revolver was drawn and he wheeled, and he knew well how to use one, and he was bringing it to a level to shoot Waring in the back ere the crowd anticipated his cowardly purpose and could give a cry of warning.

Another moment and Wash Waring would have been killed, but he escaped as by a miracle.

There was one in that crowd quicker than Dave Scully on the draw and shoot, and he had anticipated the purpose of the man against the landlord.

He had seen through his bluff to get the drop on Wash Waring, and his revolver spoke just a flash of time quicker than did Scully's.

In fact, his shot saved Waring, and Dave Scully's revolver was fired as it fell from his hand, for a bullet had torn through the wrist.

It was Dart Deering that had fired the shot in the nick of time.

CHAPTER XVI.

QUICK SHOT KIT'S WARNING.

Wash Waring realized his danger, his escape, and who had saved his life all in the same moment.

He had turned to see Dave Scully's revolver fall from his hand, and saw Dart Deering advancing with weapon leveled, while he heard the stern words:

"Hands up, Dave Scully, and quick about it!"

Reluctantly the left hand of Dave Scully was raised from the revolver in his belt, for he knew that Dart Deering meant his command and should be obeyed.

Then he raised his left and his wounded right hand over his head and cried:

"They are up!"

"Don't kill me, pard!"

"Had I wished to kill you as your cowardly act toward Landlord Waring deserved, I would have done so and not shot your hands.

"Will you dress his wound, Pard Waring?"

"Certainly, Deering. Come in, Dave, and I'll fix you up all right," was the reply.

Holding his bleeding arm, Dave Scully followed Wash Waring into the inn, while Dart Deering called to a couple of men and asked them to look after the body of Tot Dent, after which he led his horse to the stable.

Soon after he entered the room where Wash Waring was dressing Dave Scully's wound.

"I hope it is not very bad, Wash."

"Fortunately, your bullet passed between the bones above the wrist, mak-

ing an ugly but not dangerous wound, Dart—Scully was lucky."

"That's what I thinks now myself, pards; fer if I'd hev kilt you, landlord, the boys would hev strung me up, an' I'm in luck ag'in in Pard Deering not killin' me, and jist woundin' me."

"I axes ther pardon of yer both, gents, 'deed I does, and thanks you, Pard Deering, and you, too, landlord, fer fixin' up my wound."

"Hes I said enough?"

"Enough said, Dave," replied Landlord Waring, while Dart Deering replied:

"All right, Scully, and you can board here until your hand gets well at my expense."

"I'll look after him, Dart, and he shall not want for anything," and having finished dressing the wound, Wash Waring led the way to the room he intended Scully to occupy.

"I think I can make use of him, Dart, though I will be sure before I trust him."

"Yes, indeed, for he's as treacherous as a snake, as his act toward you showed."

"He is, indeed, and yet I believe I can make him serve a purpose I have in view; but, now, my dear pard, here's my hand to show you how I appreciate the service you have done me."

"I am not a happy man. I am living here as an outcast, as it were, among no friendships, yet with a hope and aim in view, and I am making money rapidly."

"But I love life in spite of the past, and you have saved me from quick death to-day," and the landlord spoke with much feeling.

"I certainly did not intend he should kill you, nor did I care to kill him."

"But how is Quick Shot Kit getting along?"

"He was all right when he left here this morning, as well as could be expected."

"Left here?"

"Where has he gone?"

"That I could not find out, but soon after you left, wounded in both hands as you well know, he mounted his horse and rode away, I was told—why, there he is now," and looking out of the window in the gathering twilight, they saw the man with both his hands in a sling, dismounting from his horse and enter the inn.

"I'd like to know where he has been," said Dart Deering.

"As I would also, for I fear only mischief would take him away wounded badly as he is."

"Yes, and I'll see what he has to say," and walking quickly out of Waring's private room, where the two were, Dart Deering met Quick Shot Kit face to face.

"Hello, Kit, how are you feeling?"

"A little bad just now, thank you, Mr. Deering, for I've had a long ride fer a man in my fix."

"Why did you go?"

"I'll tell you," and glancing around to see that no one was near to hear him, he whispered:

"You saved my life last night, fer you c'd hev kilt me, and would hev done right, only you showed a heart and spared me."

"Well?"

"Then you treated me white and squar' and I'm not one to fergit a good deed or harm done me."

"Well?"

"When I heerd you had rid away t'day, I thought as how you had gone on ther trail with thet wagon train, and I went after you."

"For what purpose?"

"Why, ter tell yer thet yer must be on yer guard day and night, fer thar be them as means yer harm, an' them with yer as well."

"I hain't betrayin' no secrets, I hain't provin' traitor to no one, only I warns yer fer what yer done fer me, and I'd not say another word ef I died fer it."

"Where did you go to find me?"

"To the wagon camp."

"Who did you see?"

"The Don and all of 'em, fer ther young leddy come in while I were thar an' told how you hed rescued her."

"I told 'em you hed slipped me, as they seen fer themselves, thet it were my fault, and I wanted ter see yer, and then I left and come back here."

"I won't say no more, only you look out for snakes in yer trail."

"I will, and I thank you, Kit, for I believe you are sincere, but now come in and let Waring look after your wounds, for they need attention, I know."

"Indeed, they does," was the reply.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN UNKNOWN LEADER.

The wounded hands of Quick Shot Kit did indeed need attention, for, forced to use them as he had been, the dressing and bandages had become misplaced and he was suffering much from them.

Without a word as to the warning given him, Dart Deering asked Wash Waring to do all he could for the man, adding:

"He has had a long ride of it, Wash, and needs your best care, and I'll help you, for I am no bad surgeon myself, experience having been my teacher."

Wash Waring saw that Dart Deering felt confidence in Quick Shot Kit from some reason he did not know, and he set to work and tenderly and skillfully dressed the wounds.

"I thank you, pards, indeed I do," and as he turned to leave the room he whispered to Dart Deering:

"I feels like a new man now, but you mind my warning, fer I knows, and when you leaves here for ther wagon camp don't go ther reg'lar trail—see?"

"I understand."

"Go around, not ther reg'lar way, and luck go with yer," and Quick Shot Kit left the room.

"Well, there is an odd piece of humanity, Wash."

"He told you something?"

"Yes, why he went away to-day."

"You believe him?"

"I do."

"I believe you can," and then the landlord heard what Kit had told the guide.

"He is one of the gang Red Rob belongs to, and Dave Scully is another."

"So I believe."

"Well, you cut the gang down by one killed and two wounded, and because you spared his life Quick Shot Kit wished to save you."

"That is my idea, and I expect more of the gang will have to pass in their chips."

"But have you made any discoveries, Wash?"

"Well, I'll tell you what I have found out, and you can take it for what it is worth."

"I'll do that, sure."

"I made the discovery that Red Rob has been for some time one of a gang of men who are living in Advance City and the mines, but are doing outlaw work."

"I felt sure there was such a band here."

"Yes, Red Rob after he killed Will Wheatley, did not go far away, but remained in hiding, and he was kept posted by his allies."

"Yes, they being in this settlement."

"They are."

"And they have it in for you, for they fear you."

"I hope they will have more cause to than I have already given them."

"They seem to think you are a Government spy, and when Buffalo Bill came here, they believe you sent for him."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, and as you became guide of the Don's train, the men wished to get rid of you so that Red Rob could take the work on hand, and he risked coming to the saloon to get that game on with you, and had his men or men outside to shoot

you through the window so he would not be suspected, but your quick act and clever act thwarted him."

"I see. You have certainly found out much that is valuable to me, Wash."

"Anything more?"

"Only I believe Quick Shot Kit, Dave Scully, and Tot Dent belong to the gang."

"So I believe, as also the man Buffalo Bill killed and who was shot by the bullet intended for me last night."

"Well, that removes three of the gang by death and Kit and Scully are out of the fight for some time at least with their wounds."

"Yes, by Red Rob and two comrades are to be looked after, which you know Buffalo Bill reproted five men on the trail the wagon train is to take."

"Yes, but might they not have been Red Rob and his party?"

"It is possible, though I think not, as Red Rob and his party, added to the five, would be none too many to make a raid upon the wagon train, even with the aid of redskins whom they can get to join them."

"You are right, Dart."

"But there is one thing more I wish to tell you."

"Well?"

"Red Rob is not the actual leader, nor is Quick Shot Kit."

"So I have thought."

"He is an unknown, a secret leader, a man of mystery, for I can learn nothing more about him than that he is by no means a myth, but a man with a will, pluck, and determination, only he keeps in the background, will not be seen, and his tools do the work, so that makes him the more dangerous."

"So it does, but we must find out just who this secret leader is, solve the riddle of this mysterious individual."

"I hope to do so before you leave as guide for that train, Dart, but to-morrow will tell," replied Wash Waring as he led the way to the supper room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SCOUT STARTS ON THE TRAIL.

"Well, Wash, I've ordered my horses gotten ready to start, so will say good-by, for it is dark now, and I wish to slip away as quietly as possible," said Dart Deering on the next evening, as he entered the landlord's room in the large and rambling dog cabin inn.

"Can't stay a few days longer, Dart?"

"No, for I asked Miss Ellwardo to tell her father I would reach his camp to-night, ready to make a start with the wagon train in the morning, and I have already delayed a day, you know."

"Well, I am sorry I cannot give you full information, but I have only found out this afternoon that the real leader of the outlaw band only Red Rob appears to know, and who he really is for the life of me I cannot think."

"Have you any suspicions?"

"A dozen; yes, more; yet I dare not make a break."

"My idea is, from what my men have reported, is that the desire of the leader is to capture Miss Ellwardo and hold her for ransom, and the effort will be made on the train."

"Doubtless, if such is his intention, and Red Rob's attempt to capture her carries this idea out?"

"Of course, with you out of the way, on the trail, some one of the gang could appear and be guade and with such an ally Miss Ellwardo's capture could be readily arranged."

"Yes, it could."

"So you must take every care of yourself, for upon you, Dart, everything depends for the safety of that wagon train."

"Yes, I can see that."

"But, as he feels, or fears, that Miss Ellwardo recognized him, as if she did not, from his having been with the train coming on, or if she did not, that I did,

Red Rob will not dare himself to go to the Don and ask to be his guide."

"No, but one of his men, unknown to the Don, could offer, after you were put out of the way, Dart."

"Yes, that is true, and without a guide the train people will be only too glad to accept the services of one who might happen along and offer to guide them to their destination."

"So you see how careful you must be."

"I wish I had engaged another man to go along with me, in case of accident to me."

"Who, for instance?"

"Ah! That is just it."

"You do not know one you can trust, who is a scout and guide, for those who are capable might be members of this very secret band."

"True. I will risk it alone. Good-bye, Wash, and if I find a way I'll send you a letter from the end of the trail, or come back myself once they are safely at Flagstaff."

"are safely at Flagstaff."

"I have heard that Miss Ellwardo is very beautiful, Dart, and you have already rendered her good service, so if you escape the secret chief's plots, you may not escape her, and that will mean your remaining at Flagstaff."

"If I fell in love with her, and she returned my love, it might, Wash, but I'll let you hear from me in some way, so again good-bye, pard, and if anything should happen to me, if I am called out of life, there are papers in your strong box that will explain what I wish you to do, and I have left a letter on the table in my cabin."

"Good-bye and God bless you, old fellow," and grasping the hand of the scout in farewell Wash Waring saw him walk away, mount his horse, and with the pack animal in lead, ride away in the darkness.

"Well, what will the end be?" muttered the landlord as he walked over toward the Good Luck Saloon, where all was going briskly.

Quietly riding away from the inn, Dart Deering left the settlement unseen, save by two or three men on their way to the saloons to spend the night, and with his hat drawn down over his eyes he did not think he was recognized, or at least hoped that he was not.

He did not care to be recognized, for if he could get off with the wagon train on its long trail without his start being known, he was anxious to do so.

He recalled the words of Quick Shot Kit, the warning given him that his life was in danger, and on his way to the wagon train not to take the regular trail, but to go by another and longer one.

Where the trails divided he halted, half inclined to go the regular one, which was half a dozen miles shorter, and not to heed the warning.

"I'll chance it," he said, and was guiding his horse by the regular and shorter way, when hoarsely came the command:

"Halt! Don't take that trail!"

CHAPTER XIX.

HEEDING A WARNING.

Dart Deering pulled up sharply at the words coming out of the darkness from some one unknown and so near to him, when he had believed he had left the last human being behind at the cabin half a mile back.

His hand dropped instinctively upon his revolver, and he was ready to meet a foe if foe it was.

"Who are you that warns me," he asked calmly.

"I know I took chances in headin' you off, pard, after you was warned thar was danger on your trail, but I risked it to be sure yer heeded what I told yer."

"You are Quick Shot Kit?"

"That same."

"Are you alone?"

"I are."

"Why are you here?"

"I kinder doubted you, knowin' you

was a man of big nerve, and was fearful yer might go ther reg'lar way."

"Which I did."

"Then yer doubted me 'cause I'm a hard one?"

"No, I did not doubt your sincerity."

"What then?"

"I decided to take chances."

"I thought it."

"I could not just see how any one would know when I was going, and so concluded I'd risk it."

"Well, they does know you is goin'."

"Who?"

"Them as would kill you without marcy."

"Why?"

"Yer has done 'em a wrong."

"In what way?"

"You is ter be guide fer ther train camped down on ther lower trail near ther settlement of Lost Resort?"

"I have made no particular secret of the fact."

"That's whar yer has done a wrong to them, I tells yer of."

"I don't just see how?"

"I'll tell yer."

"If it hadn't been fer ther big scout, Buff'ler Bill, a man I knows of would hev been guide fer thet train."

"Well?"

"But he got ther job, or pertended ter take it, and then tarned it over ter you."

"He was ordered back to his command, which was going on an Indian expedition."

"So he told."

"It is true."

"I guesses he writes his own orders, fer ther man hes got more power out on these plains then any General."

"He deserves it, for he has done more to civilize the wild west than any hundred men have."

"as don't want too much civilization—see?"

"They are the men who compose the bad element and really need civilizing more than do the Indians, and this Buffalo Bill well knows."

"Oh, yes, he knows too much, for he's a clever one, and I takes off my hat to him every time as ther biggest man this country ever tarned out."

"I agree with you, and as square as he is brave and generous."

"He's all that, only them is vartues we don't like too much of in these parts."

Dart Deering laughed, and drawing closer, for he had now come into view, Quick Shot Kit said:

"An' you is another one like him."

"Thanks."

"That's why you is unpopular."

"Well, I am what I am."

"I knows that, and your sparin' my life when yer should hev took it made me yer friend."

"I am glad, for I seek no man's ill will."

"But yer gits it without tryin'."

"I cannot help that."

"But yer kin help throwin' yer life away."

"And you think I will if I take this trail?"

"I knows it."

"Then I am ambushed?"

"You is."

"How many?"

"Maybe three, maybe more."

"Tell me more?"

"They are them as you tuk away ther chance of runnin' ther Don's train ter suit themselves, fer with yer as guide they knows thar will be no funny business."

"Why do they wish to harm that particular train?"

"They is arter gold."

"What will they get from it?"

"Gold in plenty, fer thet Don hes ther dust, though he plays poor."

"He's goin' out inter ther wilderness fer reasons of his own, and he's got his gold along, and ef ther gang gits him in a tight place he'll produce ther dust."

"Ther man I has in my mind came

along some ways with ther train, and he knows, and he belongs to ther Advance City gang, as I happens ter know, and he and others don't intend you shall be guide, so I says you must not go this trail to ther camp—see?"

"I do."

"And yer'll heed my warning?"

"I will," said Dart Deering, firmly.

CHAPTER XX.

TAKING THE LONG TRAIL.

"I is glad ter hear yer say that, pard, fer I knows what I is talkin' about, and I don't want ter see yer downed."

"I thank you."

"I has much ter thank you fer."

"But its this way, if you gits ter ther train all right, I hes paid a debt I owes you, and if you don't, then I hes done wrong."

"Well?"

"Once yer gits to ther train, I knows yer kin take care of yerself, and it, and that not my lookout, having warned yer."

"But I dones tell yer ag'in thet you will hev trouble, fer ther Don's gold is wanted."

"More I will not say, only look sharp, as I tells yer, and I hes done my duty."

"The truth is you are a member of this band?"

"I hain't sayin' a word."

"And the fellow known as Red Rob, who was the one who came on with the train for some distance, is the leader of the band, who intend to try and capture it?"

"I see yer keeps yer eyes and ears open an' yer brain workin', but I hain't sayin' anything."

"You need not, for I know more than you think I do."

"Maybe."

"And I know that the Don is a poor man and has no gold along, save enough for expenses."

"You don't seem like one ter lie ter put a gang off ther track, and I believes yer means what yer says."

"I do."

"Well, yer is away off, fer ther Don hes got gold in plenty and got it along."

"I cannot believe it."

"It is so."

"Well, it must be taken care of for him."

"Oh! You'll do your share, I knows; but gold hunters takes big chances to git what they wants."

Dart Deering made no immediate response.

He felt sure that the man was telling him as much as he dared without incriminating himself and being a traitor to the band.

He thanked him for what he had done, and made up his mind to carry the train through if it was in his power to do so.

He could not believe that the Don had the gold it was claimed he had, for Buffalo Bill would have told him, surely, instead of saying that he had lost his fortune.

Red Rob may have thought there was gold along, or he may have told his gang so to carry out some motive he had in view.

What was that motive?

That Dart Deering could only guess at.

At last he said:

"That man Red Rob is not the leader of that band of cowardly cutthroats."

"Wall, I kin tell yer nothin' as to thet, pard."

"Do you know the real leader?"

After a moment of hesitation the reply was:

"I doesn't, indeed."

"Well, I'll not ask you more on that subject, and I thank you for placing me on my guard."

"I is glad ter do it."

"Do you know where on this regular trail that ambush is?"

"I does not."

"It may be near here, and then far away, but if I know'd I'd not tell yer."

"Why?"

"I warns yer ter keep yer from bein' kilt, but if I told yer whar ther gang was layin' fer yer, I knows yer'd risk it facin' 'em in yer own way, and yer'd kill more o' my pards ef yer got downed yer-self—see?"

"I do, and I will ask you no more."

"It was good of you, wounded as you are, to come here to-night to head me off, for Landlord Waring said you had fever to-day, and were suffering considerable, so you must return at once, and I'll let you ride my horse back and walk along with you."

"No yer don't, fer I kin make it, and I wouldn't be seen with yer fer big money."

"Well, return now, and tell Landlord Waring you saw me."

"Then ask him to look to your wounded hands well to-night, and I wish to tell you that you are to remain at the Good Cheer Inn at my expense until you get entirely well."

"I knows how good you hes been to me."

"I trust we will meet again some time—good-by."

The man held up his bandaged hand and Dart Deering placed his fingers on the pulse.

"It is quicker than I like, and you have fever, so get to bed as soon as you can," and the guide rode on, leading his pack horse.

Looking back he saw Quick Shot Kit still watching him, for the man seemed to dread that in spite of his warning he might take the short trail.

But Dart Deering was not reckless enough to do so, in the face of the man's urgent warning, and besides he had given his word and would keep it.

So he turned into the long trail and went on his way at a trot, for he wished to reach the camp of the Don's wagon trail before all had retired, and to let them know he was on hand, ready for an early start on their perilous way.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE OVERLAND TRAVELERS.

When Idolene Ellwardo parted with Dart Deering after the great service he had rendered her, she rode on toward her camp, going at a slow pace, as she saw that her horse was still a trifle lame, and she did not wish to add to it by fast driving.

She was much impressed by her escape, and realized most fully, from what she had seen, that the guide was a man upon whom her father could wholly depend.

"He is a man with a history, I am sure."

"A man with the courtly manners of a well-bred gentleman, whose language is not of this wild land, handsome and with a certain self-contained manner that wins respect."

"Who is he, or what he has been, is guesswork with us; but that other remarkable man, Buffalo Bill, recommends him thoroughly, and such a recommendation is worth a great deal."

"I remember how earnestly the guide said:

"I give you my pledge, Buffalo Bill, to do by the Don and those with him as I know you would do, and if I fail I will at least have the consciousness of having done my duty."

"Both father and mother were impressed by his words, as I was, and how he said them."

"Well, he has begun well to keep his pledge to Buffalo Bill by the way he risked death to save me."

"It was a close call for me, and what the result would have been Heaven only knows."

So musing as she rode along, Idolene at last came in view of the camp, and she shuddered as the thought flashed upon her that she had come so near to never seeing it and those she loved again.

The camp was a pretty one and picturesque looking, situated upon the banks

of a small stream a mile from a group of cabins known as Last Resort.

There were some fifty souls all told in the wagon train, a score of them being men, as many more women and girls, and the remainder children, ranging from Mora Ellwardo, a handsome lad of fifteen, down to a tot of two years old.

They were not of an ordinary class, and had means enough to come well provided with ambulances and wagons, fine teams of mules, and a fine lot of horses.

All that they needed for the long trail and to establish themselves in their new homes they had brought along.

There were cows, pigs in a cage, chickens, geese, turkeys and ducks in coops, and a dozen dogs or more.

One wagon served as an armory, and in it were guns, revolvers, rifles, ammunition, all in large quantities.

They had tents, cooking utensils galore, and were in fact thoroughly fitted out, but if they were carrying any large sum of gold along it was not spoken of openly.

The men were all organized into three bands of seven each, with a captain over each squad, and the half dozen boys from twelve to fifteen formed another company with Mora Ellwardo for leader.

Over all was Don Ellwardo as chief.

The women each had their separate duties to perform, and in fact the camp and marching of the train was in military order.

When Idolene rode up there were ready hands to aid her to dismount and take her horse.

Straight to her parents' quarters she went, and her face was white now, and each one saw that she had something to tell them.

Her story was soon told, and the message of Dart Deering delivered to her father, that he would not come to camp before the following night, and to have all in readiness for a start the next morning.

She also told that she had recognized in one of her pursuers Red Rob, the man who had been their guide a part of the way, and who was very unpopular with all.

CHAPTER XXII.

IDOLENE'S FEAR.

"I hardly know how to express my thanks to that noble man, Deering, my child, for from what has he not saved you?" and Don Ellwardo's voice had a quiver in it that revealed how deeply he felt.

"Yes, Idolene, he has saved you, indeed, for I can appreciate just what you would have done if captured by those lawless men," her mother said, while she tried to brush back bravely the tears that rose in her eyes.

"Mother, I had made up my mind as to what I should do.

"I felt that those men were the lowest of human kind, and that I might as well look for mercy to wild beasts as to them."

"Just as well," said the Don.

"So I had decided if they came up with me to turn at bay and order them back.

"The one who refused to obey I meant to kill with my revolver, and then, if I could not escape, I had the weapon with which to take my own life."

"My brave girl!"

"It is just what I knew you would do," said the Don, while the mother could only murmur:

"My poor child!"

"But the guide saw me and he stood at bay, counting no odds to save me.

"His face shows what he is, and, losing William Cody, we are fortunate in having secured the services of such a man, and not had to rely upon that fellow who hung to us so and seemed so anxious to become our guide," said the Don.

"You refer to the man who called himself Red Rob, on account of his long red hair and beard?" said Mrs. Ellwardo.

"Yes, wife."

"Red Rob was doubtless the name given him on account of his red feeds,

mother, for he was the leader of the four men who tried to capture me."

"What!"

"Do you mean it, my child?" came the queries of the father and mother.

"Indeed, I do mean it, for I recognized him, and he was the one who gave the orders, though one of his men having a faster horse than he, was nearest to me, and thus lost his life, for the guide killed him."

"I wish it had been that traitor."

"Yes, father, but his horse was killed, and I am sure he was wounded.

"The guide went off on their trail after starting me on the right road to camp."

"Well, I hope no harm will befall him, my child."

"He said he wished to find out if there were more in the band, from which way they had come, and where they were going, for he had seen the man the night before up at Advance City, and he had caused some trouble."

"I don't doubt it."

"But the Senor Deering said that he would arrive to-morrow night in camp?"

"Yes, sir, and to have all ready for our early start the following morning, father."

"I will do so."

"But, again, I must say how rejoiced I am that you had such a brave defender, for few men would care, even in defense of a woman, to risk such odds as he did."

"And would have come out of it so well, father."

"Well, my child, you have had a lesson about going off alone from camp, even on your fast horse, Pathfinder."

"Yes, and one I shall heed, sir, though I hope we will have no more trouble, only—"

"Only what?"

"I do not know, father, save that for some reason I have a dread of evil to befall us."

"I may be wrong, but there is a feeling upon me which I cannot throw off, try as I may."

"You are nervous, Idolene, and it will wear away soon."

"I had the feeling before, sir, for it came upon me from the moment I found Buffalo Bill—I should say Scout Cody—was not going to be our guide."

"I certainly think we have cause to trust Senor Deering."

"Yes, father, but the feeling of coming evil will not go away," assured Idolene, with a sigh.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A HOLD-UP ON THE TRAIL.

Along the trail he had taken on account of Quick Shot Kit's warning that there was an ambush in his path on the other one, Dart Deering made his way at a brisk trot.

He knew the trail well, and had no dread of running upon foes there in the darkness, for he had firm faith in Quick Shot Kit, even though he knew what he was.

He had gone over a dozen miles from the spot where he had parted with Quick Shot Kit, and had been something over two hours on the way, when he came to an open valley, through which ran a large stream.

The trail bordered the stream, the banks of which were fringed with timber, but the valley was broken in places, and it was only good riding close along the water.

Ordinarily the guide would rather have kept out of rifle range of the stream's bank, as foes might readily lurk in the fringe of timbers, but he held on his way, hoping to reach the Don's camp within another hour.

Ahead of him as he rode along he heard a dull roar and knew it to come from the water dashing through the rapids just there.

As he neared the rapids the stream gave a sharp bend, the trail following it.

Just as he came to the bend he suddenly heard:

"Halt, friend!"

It was the word friend and something in the tone that kept Dart Deering from opening with his revolvers right into the growth of timber at the bend, and from whence the sound of the voice came.

He drew rein and called out:

"Well, say your say quick, for I have no time to tarry."

"Even to talk to me, Dart Deering?"

"Ah! Who are you?"

"Do you not know?"

"There is something in the tone of your voice that has a familiar sound."

"I should well think so."

"But I am mistaken, for it cannot be—"

"It is, though."

"My God! I believed you dead!"

"You have heard so, and hoped so, but were mistaken."

"I had heard so, yes, and from, as I believed, good authority, though I had not hoped so, unless—"

"Unless what?" asked the man with a sneer in his tone, as he stepped out into the trail directly ahead of Dart Deering.

He was a tall, well-formed man, as seen in the darkness, and wore a broad sombrero that completely shaded his face.

In his hand he held a revolver.

"Unless what?"

"Are you afraid to finish your sentence?" he asked as Dart Deering remained silent.

"Unless for your sake it were best that you were dead."

"Or for your sake?"

"I do not take myself into consideration."

"That is strange."

"I mean when you are concerned."

"Well, I assure you I am to be taken into consideration now, as I have been in the past."

"You are sorry I am not dead and alone for your sake, not mine, and let me tell you, Dart Deering, that I am no skull and crossbone, but a man of flesh and blood and very much alive."

"So I see now."

"And you would have feared my ghost, eh, had it met you on the trail?"

"I fear nothing and no man, even you?" hotly returned the guide.

The other laughed a low, bitter, meaning laughter, and then said:

"We shall see."

"Yes, we shall see."

"But, tell me, how did you recognize me in the darkness?"

"I knew that you were coming."

"Ha! Then I have been deceived," and there was a tone of inquiry in the guide's tone as he felt that Quick Shot Kit had after all proved treacherous to him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHO WAS THE MAN?

"You knew of my coming?" asked Dart Deering as the other did not reply to the remark that he had been betrayed.

"Oh, yes. I keep posted."

"Tell me what you are doing here?"

"Making a living."

"A dishonest one, I fear."

"The world owes me a living, no matter how I get it."

"I feared you thought so."

"But how long have you been here?"

"Several months."

"Strange we have not met before?"

"I came here to see you, but then formed a different plan, and hence it was to my interest to avoid you."

"And why have you made yourself known now?"

"It is to my interest to do so."

"You say that you knew of my coming?"

"I did."

"How so?"

"I have been watching your movements closely."

"But how did you know that I was coming this trail to-night?"

"I knew that you were to be the guide of that rich Mexico-American Don out to the end of his journey, and that you were

to go to-night to his camp to take charge, and start from Advance City, hence I put my men upon the lower trail, while I took this one to guard."

"Alone?"

There was something in the question that made the man suspicious, for he replied quickly:

"Oh, no, I am not alone. I am not such a fool as that, knowing you as I do, for if ever man had pluck you are than man."

"You have no cause to fear me."

"I think differently."

"I am sorry. But tell me your motive in halting me?"

"To carry out a certain plan I have settled upon."

"Name it."

"You were on your way to the Don's camp?"

After a second's hesitation the guide answered:

"I am."

"You are the guide?"

"Yes."

"Going to Flagstaff Arizona?"

"To that part of the country."

"You start at dawn?"

"Yes."

"Do you expect to get through in safety?"

"I hope so."

"How many are in the outfit?"

"That is my affair. I have no time to tarry here, so say what you wish, for if you need money I have considerable with me and will, of course, help you."

"I wish more than gold?"

"What?"

"A rich wife."

"I cannot help you, would not if I could help you to make a woman's life a curse."

"You regard me highly."

"It is your own fault."

"Come, tell me what sum you want, and if within reason I will give it to you."

"You go well fixed, it seems, with money."

"A man leading the life I do should never be without money if he can get it honestly."

"Which of course you do."

"I try to."

"Name your sum."

"I tell you I wish a rich wife, and you can help me."

"Which I will not do."

"We shall see. The woman I wish to make my wife is the Don's daughter."

"Ah! That noble girl!"

"You've got it also, have you—the same that I have—love for Idolene Ellwardo?"

"Do you know her?"

"I have met her."

"Then you are, indeed, merciless to place your thoughts on such a woman."

"Well, I have done so, and you are to help me get her."

"Never!" and the voice of the guide rang with anger.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE THREAT.

Again came the harsh, bitter laugh from the lips of the man who barred the way of Dart Deering.

He had replaced his revolver in his belt, and seemed to have no fear of the guide, who, also, upon recognizing the man, who seemed before to have crossed his life in some mysterious way, had also put up his weapon.

"You say that you will not help me get the Don's daughter?"

"I certainly would not do a sin so vile."

"But I am determined to have the girl, and as equally determined that you shall help me."

"Do not hold such belief."

"We shall see."

"Yes."

"I wish you to let me go as the guide in your place."

"Impossible."

"I will share half I get from the Don's fortune with you."

"I am not to be bought."

"You can write a letter, saying that you were kept back by important business you could not neglect, and say that I would act as guide in your place."

"Ah, no."

"I tell you it is worth it, for the Don has got plenty of wealth."

"I will not."

"You are in love with the girl yourself, then?"

"No, for I have met her but twice, and but for a few minutes each time, I may say."

"There is such a thing as love at first sight."

"Well, it is not so with me, though I respect Miss Ellwardo most highly."

"You can do this for me if you will."

"But I will not, so stand aside and let me pass on, for there is nothing in common in our lives now."

"There never was."

"We will not argue that point."

"Say if you need a few hundred dollars, and I will give them to you."

"Then our paths separate in life, and pardon me for saying I hope never to meet again."

"I am perfectly willing for our paths to separate, and expect them to do so, while, as to their meeting again, that depends."

"Upon what?"

"What I wish of you."

"This is all idle talk. Stand aside."

"No," and the man grasped the bridle rein of the guide's horse, at the same time, with his other hand, drawing a revolver.

"Ah! You threaten me! Do not go too far!"

"I will go that far, that you are either to help me become guide of that wagon train, relinquishing your claim to me, or I will—"

"What?"

"Be guide without your aid."

"Do you not know that a word from me would ruin your chances there?"

"Yes, if you spoke it."

"Which I will do if you attempt to interfere with me as guide."

"If you can."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean just this, Dart Deering:

"I mean that you relinquish in my favor or I will kill you as I would any other man that crossed my path to thwart me, and write the letter myself, for they do not know your writing, and then go there to the Don and take your place as guide."

Dart Deering fairly started at the bold words and threat of the man.

For a moment he did not speak, but then said:

"I do believe that you are capable of doing just what you threaten to do, and, so believing, you may find me also merciless, so do not drive me beyond all bounds of self-control."

"It's just what I intend to do," and the man leveled his revolver full at the guide's breast.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A STRANGE DUEL.

It seemed a most critical moment for Dart Deering.

The man who stood at his bridle rein with one hand leveling a revolver had shown himself to be a determined, deadly character from what he had said.

But the guide did not flinch, did not attempt to draw a weapon.

He sat upon his horse showing no intention to reach for the revolver so near his hand.

Perhaps he felt that it would mean instant death for him to make the slightest effort.

Perhaps he would not bring matters to a climax until better prepared to face so cruel and cunning a foe.

"Do you expect to frighten me into obeying you?"

The question was asked in a reproachful, rather than angry, tone.

"No, for I know that would be useless, as there is no fear in you."

"What then?"

"I will give you a chance for your life. You are one whom I do not care to murder, and would not kill unless placing myself in equal danger, on the same terms with you."

"That cannot be."

"Do you mean that you will not protect your life?"

"I did not say that."

"What then?"

"The terms will not be equal."

"I do not see it."

"Why?"

"You are known as a dead shot out here, and I am one, too."

"Still, you and I, in my mind, could not be on equal terms."

"Some accursed meaning you have in your words, which I do not understand; but come down to business acts."

"That is what I wish to do."

"You refuse to help me?"

"As you ask, yes."

"You will, for I intend that you shall. I have you covered and will kill if you force me to do."

"Otherwise, I will give you a chance for your life."

"What is it?"

"While I keep you covered you must swear to meet me as man to man."

"Once you swear, I know you will keep your oath, and so will trust you to do as I say."

"I do this, as I said, for to kill you I wish to risk death alos."

"I am not so generous to others."

"No? Well, what do you wish, for I see that you are determined to have your way."

"I am. Will you swear to dismount, stand back to back with me, at the word march ten paces, halt, wheel, and fire, and I doing the same, it will place us upon equal terms, so the best man may win."

"If I refuse?"

"I will kill you—I swear it."

"Make the distance each is to step off five paces, instead of ten, and I accept, for the latter puts us at too great a distance in this darkness."

"It is night, starlight; but I agree."

"Then I accept."

"You swear it?"

"I do."

"Then dismount and we will carry out the agreement, and, remember, I intend to kill you."

"If you can."

"Yes."

The man lowered his weapon, Dart Deering at once dismounting, and stepping well out into the open, free from the trees, they stood back to back, revolvers in hand.

"Have you no witnesses here?"

"None—I am alone."

"All right, I am ready, and it is five paces."

"Yes—I will count."

Then after a moment he called out:

"One! Two! Three! Four! Five!"

Both started off at the word one, stepped briskly the five paces, wheeled, and fired almost together.

And one man fell, while the revolver dropped from the other's hand.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FOR GOOD OR FOR EVIL.

The Don sat up very late, awaiting the coming of the guide.

Others had kept him company for a while, but his wife and daughter retired to their tent, then one by one the men sought rest, until by midnight he sat alone by the camp fire reading some papers, which, with a large mail, had overtaken them at Last Resort that day.

One o'clock came and still the guide did not put in an appearance.

"If he had started from Advance City at dark, as he told Idolene he would, he could have ridden the distance in three

hours or a little more, and should have been here by ten o'clock.

"I hope no harm has befallen him," mused the Don.

Another hour passed and the Don grew very anxious.

He awoke the man in the train who was next in authority to himself, and said:

"Hartley, he has not come yet."

"What time is it," Captain Ellwardo?" asked Hunt Hartley.

"Two o'clock."

"Then he has been detained, sir, so you had better leave the dogs on watch and turn in."

"I believe I will, for we cannot start unless he arrives."

"No, indeed, sir."

The Don walked back to the fire and just then one of the dogs gave a cry at some discovery he had made.

The rest of the canine guard took up the alarm and all barked in chorus.

"He is coming," said the Don cheerily, and soon after a stern voice commanded the dogs be silent, and into view rode a horseman, followed by a pack animal.

He rode up to the fire, and dismounted as the Don met him with extended hand.

"I am sorry, Don Ellwardo, but I have a wounded hand I must ask you to dress for me."

"I knew you had been detained from some good cause."

"You had trouble, then, Senor Deering?"

"Yes, sir. I met an enemy on the trail here. We exchanged shots, and his bullet cut through my hand and shattered the butt of my revolver."

"Too bad; but I hope it is not serious."

"The bone was only grazed, sir, but the shock benumbed my hand, and I have lost considerable blood."

"I will have it seen to at once, for one of our party is a physician."

"But your foe?"

"He fell at my fire, sir, and, as there were others, I came on, but was detained in catching my pack horse, for he ran away."

One of the men of the train, Walter Ross by name, was a young physician, fresh from graduation and a year's course of surgery in a hospital, and he had shown his skill already on a number of occasions when injuries had been received, so quickly answered the Don's call to come and see the guide, who was wounded.

The hand was not found to be seriously hurt, the bullet having passed through between the bones, merely grazing one.

The young doctor very carefully dressed the wound, the guide not flinching under the probe, and then the Don said:

"We will not start to-morrow, Mr. Deering, but delay until your hand is in better condition."

"No, indeed, sir, for I am used to hard knocks, and this will do me no real harm."

"We must get off on the trail soon after dawn."

"Very well, if you think best; but you will have time for several hours' rest."

"I will throw myself on my blankets right here, sir, by the fire."

"Why, I have a bed for you, and—"

"No, indeed, sir, I will rest here splendidly."

"Well, I'll turn in for a short rest, but before I do, I wish to tell you now much I appreciate, as also does Mrs. Ellwardo, your brave service to our daughter."

"Do not speak of it, sir, for I did only what a man should do to help a lady in distress."

"It took a brave man to face such odds, but we will talk more about it at another time—good night," and having aided the guide to spread his blankets, the Don retired to his tent.

Just two hours after the camp was aroused by the notes of a bugle call, and instantly all was astir, and soon after

Then riding to the front the guide led the way, and the wagon train pulled out on its long trail for good or evil.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BUFFALO BILL ALERT.

Upon leaving Advance City Buffalo Bill rode off at a fairly brisk gait, the horse for the courier in lead, and giving him no trouble as so many led horses do.

The scout was anxious to get back to the camp where he had left the courier along with his own pack animal, and then, after a rest of a few hours, push rapidly on northward, for he was not one to neglect duty and wished to report with all dispatch.

"My friend Deering had a very close call from death from that assassin's bullet, and, though I did not tell him so, I believe I saved his life, for that fellow saw me just as he was about to pull trigger."

"I think that destroyed his aim in part, for he surely could not have missed hitting him in the centre of the head at that distance, and with Deering in the broad glare of light and he not in the dark."

"I followed his shot mighty quick, but wish I had been a few seconds sooner, for, though Dart made light of the gash over his temple, I fear it was a severe blow."

"Well, I hope it will not prevent his going as guide to the Don, for under his guidance I would feel mighty anxious about all of the members of that train, especially that beautiful girl."

"It will be months, I guess, before Dart gets back to Advance City and can drop me a line as to how the long trail panned out."

"That Advance City is a mighty hard place, and no mistake, and Dart Deering is a very unpopular citizen, simply because he is a square and honest man."

"It is strange how he lives a wild life, brought up as he was to one so different."

"I had my love for a wild life born in me, bred in the bone, and I grew up on it, so it's no wonder that I love these trackless plains, grand mountains, and the dangers and excitement of living here, but I should think it would be different with such men as Dart Deering and Wash Waring, who certainly had not to hide themselves here for crimes they had been guilty of, as alas! so many have to do."

"Now, I cannot understand why that splendid Mexican gentleman, Don Ellwardo, should come out here with his lovely wife and beautiful daughter, when I am sure he was not driven to seek a home amid such wild scenes and daily deadly dangers."

"It would seem to me that he has other motives than wishing to seek a home in borderland."

"But, then, it is his affair, not mine, and I have always found it best to let people manage their own affairs in their own way; but yet I have an idea that it will be a love match between Miss Idolene and Dart, and he is certainly in every way worthy of her."

Though musing thus, and apparently enjoying his own thoughts as he rode along, the scout was not unconscious of his own safety.

He was well aware that he, too, had many foes, and by no means were they confined to the Indians.

The rougher element, or, rather, that is to say, the lawless element, for there were many rough men who were honest, hated Buffalo Bill as they did every representative of law and order.

Expecting him to go back on the trail he had come, some one of them might lie in wait for him to kill him when he knew that there would be no danger to himself.

Then, too, it was known that he had brought a mail carrier's pouch in to Ad-

and many valuable letters went to the soldiers from the loved ones at home.

Then, too, he had been given several valuable packages, which Wash Waring had been waiting for a good chance to send through.

As Landlord Waring was postmaster, storage agent, and express agent, in addition to his other callings as hotel boss, magistrate, proprietor of the Good Luck Gambling and Drinking Saloon, store-keeper, and doctor-in-need, it would be expected by some of the desperadoes that he would be glad of the opportunity to hand anything of value he might have to go through to such safe hands as those of Buffalo Bill, and to waylay the scout and kill him might be worth a small fortune to the one who had the nerve to undertake it.

And this very thought was in the mind of Buffalo Bill as he rode along, and with reason.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A TRIO OF PLOTTERS.

When Buffalo Bill had entered the Good Luck Saloon as he had, dragging the dead man, who had made the attempt on Dart Deering's life, there were several in the room who seemed greatly excited by his act.

There were two especially, who sat apart from the others, and who had at once recognized the dead man as their especial pard.

"It was our pard, Madero Tom, Ike," whispered one to the other.

"Sure, Denver, sartin, and he's dead as he'll ever git to be."

"Yas, Ike, and thet means revenge."

"Sartin."

"Shall we chip in, now?"

"And git our toes tarned up like Shadow Tom's is?"

"How then, fer we must make a strike fer him."

"Yer fergits thet is Buf'ler Bill."

"I don't mind."

"I does, fer when men is dyin' around sudden he keeps livin', and if we made a break now it would be our funeral terminator."

"Let's git Jake Strong, our other pard, ter help us, fer three of us kin down even Buf'ler Bill."

"Go slow ag'in, fer he hain't no ordinary man, and, though we might kill him, thar is many here as w'u'd string us up quick, while if they didn't ther army men w'u'd make it too hot fer us ter live here unless we was put on ice."

"Well, you knows; but we mustn't let poor Shadow Tom go unavenged, as he wouldn't rest well in his grave and his spook would ha'nt us."

"That's so, and I don't intend to let him go unavenged, nor does Jake Strong either, fer don't yer see he's right thar gittin' pointers, and he hain't made no bad break neither," and the speaker pointed to a man who was standing near Buffalo Bill and Wash Waring, yet not appearing to take note of the fact that the man killed by the scout was one of his boon companions.

In appearance he was a fit associate for the dead man called Shadow Tom, and the other two, Slippery Ike and Denver.

The four had been recently boon pards, though they had not let it be known, for reasons of their own, and had gone in pairs or singly when before the public eye.

But recently they were four of Advance City's hardest citizens, and whatever the motive of Shadow Tom for wishing to shoot Dart Deering down, as he had tried to do, they, if they knew, would not question, but simply would avenge his having been killed, even though Buffalo Bill had only done what was right in firing on the assassin who sought to slay his friend.

It was some time after the affair that Jake Strong, who had slipped out of the saloon when Wash Waring and Buffalo Bill had come back and walking near to

They took a drink and left the saloon.

Slippery Ike and Denver understood the signal, gave up their game of cards, walked up to the bar, took a drink each, and left the saloon.

Jake Strong was outside waiting for them, and in silence led the way into some timber.

"Pards, Buffalo Bill has kilt our pard, Shadow Tom," he said.

"We seen it."

"Killin' means killin'."

"Sartin."

"Buffalo Bill is going ter start ag'in on ther trail ter-night."

"We'll git him, then."

"Sure."

"Where?"

"Where?"

"I knows more than you does, pards," went on Jake Strong.

"Tell us."

"I has heerd what I wanted ter, and Buffalo Bill come back with important papers he got from a army courier, whose horse was broke up on ther trail."

"Yas."

"He's bought a horse from Landlord Waring, and he's goin' ter lead him back fer ther courier."

"I see."

"He left him in camp awaitin' fer him."

"Oh, yes."

"An' he's goin' ter-night, mighty sure."

"We is with yer, Jake."

"So we is."

"An' he's goin' ter take along with him a valuable mail bag, some money packages by express, and other things fer people up north, and we kin avenge poor Tom and git gold dust besides."

"We can."

"We'll do it."

"Then we'll git our horses and light out now ahead of him on ther trail, fer thar is no time to lose."

"Right now," and the three plotters walked briskly away.

CHAPTER XXX.

FOUND.

The man of the trio who had been called Jake Strong took the lead of the affair, and it was readily yielded to him by his other two companions.

He was about the best of the three for the red work in hand, being the worst of the party, if there really was a comparative degree regarding them.

They quickly got their horses, staked out in the rear of their cabins, and each went by a separate way to a certain point on the trail where they were to meet.

Jake Strong arrived first, and, skilled in border craft, lighted a match and examined the trail most attentively by its light. The other two then came, and Jake called out:

"He has not gone by yet, pards."

"Good!"

"Then we'll hev ter ride fer it, and git well ahead, fer I has a idea."

"All right, what is it?"

"Well, my idea is ter play strategy."

"How so?"

"We kin light out rapid and thet camp fire o' thet army courier will show us whar he is."

"Yes."

"Then I'll go ahead alone with one of the horses in lead, and call out to him, making believe I is Buffalo Bill."

"We see."

"You kin foller close arter me."

"Yes, we might be needed."

"Not much, fer when I sees him I'll ride close up and then plug him."

"Jake, you is a dandy."

"Ah! You is," were the admiring remarks of the other two.

"Well, I hain't no fool."

"You bet you hain't."

"But arter you kill him?"

"I call ter you."

"We'll be on hand."

"And if I looks enough of his style ter play him, I'll put on his uniform and you kin hide ther horses and wait fer Buf-

"Oh, Lordy! How fine!"

"When he comes I'll let him see me, if I is the one to play thet part, as you will if you plays it, and then I'll plug him."

"That's just right."

"You bet it is."

"Then we'll git thar, and we'll quickly find out what our game is worth in ther way of dust and, buryin' ther bodies, kin go back ter Advance City."

"You bet, and nobody will know."

"No they won't."

"And we'll avenge poor Shadow Tom."

"Yas, I'd almost forgot that in thinkin' of the dust we'd get."

So the plot to murder Buffalo Bill was arranged and the trio started out at rapid gallop upon their way.

They were well mounted and kept up a rapid gallop for miles, until one of their number drew rein and said:

"We've passed it, or maybe the camp fire has died down while he was asleep."

"We hain't passed no fire, I is sure, fer I has given my horse the rein, and ef thar had been a camp he'd a know'd it and tarned off to it."

"I believes you is right."

"We'll try it ag'in, fer thar hain't no back out in me."

Once more they pressed on, and a mile further Jake Strong beheld the glimmer of a light off on his left.

"Thar it is, pards."

They drew to a walk now and soon came near a camp up at the head of a little vale.

The three dismounted then, one of the horses was unsaddled, and Jake Strong, mounting again, with the animal in lead, rode boldly forward toward the camp fire. The others followed at a safe distance.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SUCCESS

The soldier courier was asleep, yet like Napoleon he slept with one eye open.

He knew that he was in a land where death came unexpectedly, and it was right to be on his guard.

A man who had been a plainsman before he became a soldier, he was well versed in the ways of the border.

After being left by Buffalo Bill, whom he had known for years, he determined to settle himself for a much needed rest, for he had ridden far and hard.

His horse was near, with foot raised, and with a feeling of pity he went to him and took another look at the raised hoof.

The animal was a fine one, had served him well, and he wished to see if he would be able to lead him back to the nearest place where he could be left, for he did not care to desert him on the trail to become food for wolves.

"Ah! I have found the cause of your trouble, old horse," he said, as he saw a splinter of tough wood sticking into the hoof close to the shoe.

Going to his saddle pocket he took out a pair of pinchers from a number of tools for horse shoeing which he carried along with him, then found a small bottle of turpentine, and a tin box of salve.

In a short while he had drawn out the splinter, filled the wound with the turpentine, then taking off the shoe had placed over the hoof a piece of leather, putting the salve under it and nailing on the iron shoe over the leather, he said:

"There, I think you are all right, now, old pard."

The horse put his hoof down cautiously, remembering the pain he had suffered from the splinter, but, gaining confidence when he felt no hurt, he stood well upon it.

Then the courier bathed and rubbed the leg well and remarked:

"If I had found that splinter before, I could have gotten to Advance City before Scout Cody left."

After having his supper the courier arranged his camp fire so that it would burn all night, watered his horse at a stream near, and staked him out upon a soft, grassy meadow to feed.

was soon asleep, conscious of having arranged his fire so that it could be seen only from one point, and would catch the eye of Buffalo Bill upon his return.

He knew that Indians seldom moved by night, and unless on the lookout for his camp white men would be apt to pass it by unseen.

Still he was cautious, and had looked well to the surroundings before wrapping his blanket about him.

He was soon sound asleep, though the breaking of a twig would have awakened him.

Hours had passed, and at last he awoke with a certain consciousness that all was not well.

He sat up in his blanket bed, looked about him, and his eyes rested on the fire.

It was burning well, a mass of glowing embers that spread a faint light all about his camp.

Looking at his watch, he saw that the hour of midnight had passed.

Still, over him stole that feeling of unseen danger.

"I will have a look about my camp—at my horse, for I do not like this feeling that oppresses me," he muttered.

Drawing on his cavalry boots, he rose, just as he heard hoofbeats approaching.

Listening, he was sure that there were two horses.

"It is Scout Cody returning."

"I felt that some one was near," he said.

Just then his eyes fell upon shadowy forms moving into the arc of dim firelight.

There were a horse and rider, and an animal following at the end of a lariat.

"It is the Chief of Scouts—good!"

Then he called out:

"Ho, Pard Cody, is that you?"

"Ay, ay. Is all well?" came the answer, in a low tone.

"Yes, sir."

"I have your horse for you, and now we are all right."

The soldier looked fixedly up at the speaker, now close upon him, for the voice did not sound familiar.

But as he did so he saw the hand of the horseman rise, and in it was a revolver.

Then came, in quick succession, one, two, three shots, the flashes revealing his face and form distinctly.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE TIGHTENING COILS.

The soldier-courier was taken completely by surprise.

He had expected to see Chief of Scouts William Cody.

He had been entrapped.

Jake Strong had played his game well.

He was an adept at that kind of work, and he had been successful in carrying out his plot, that far, at least.

The soldier held his belt of arms in his hands, just as he had taken it up from his bed.

The first shot struck him in the shoulder, and he staggered back, trying to get a grip on a weapon.

The second broke his arm as he got hold of the butt of his revolver.

The third pierced his breast.

A groan, the dropping of his weapons, a waving of one hand wildly, and he sunk down in his tracks, a dead man.

His presentiment of evil had been true.

Jake Strong could not refrain from a shout at his triumph.

It was but natural, and his cry of triumph re-echoed through the little valley.

Then he called out: "Come on, pards, ther work is done."

The two men followed their leader who expressed his triumph with a yell.

Then the three gathered about the fire.

"We've did ther work."

"Fine."

"Buffalo Bill next."

"Has ther soger anything of value about his clothes?"

"Yes, I'll look," said Jake Strong in a way that meant that he would.

"He's got a watch and it's a fine one," and Jake Strong put it in his pocket.

"Yes, and here's some money."

"I'll count it later, though it hain't much," and the roll of bills went into Jake's pocket.

"His weapons is fine ones," said Slippery Ike, picking them up.

"Yas, we'll devide them later," said Jake.

"Yer don't say nothin' about ther watch and money."

"Kin yer devide a watch?"

"Yer kin money."

"I kilt him, Slippery Ike."

"Let me kill Buffalo Bill," Denver pleaded.

"Who'll I kill to git anything," asked Slippery Ike.

"Pards, we'll not quarrel, fer ef we does we'll lose our game, and so far ther keerds is jist dealt out," said Jake Strong as he saw breakers ahead.

"Yas, thet's so."

"And let me tell yer I has seen a man hold a hand full of aces and yit lose ther game, and Buffalo Bill hain't no slouch ter play ag'in st."

"Right you is, Jake."

"And he hain't many miles back."

"No, he hain't," and the thought almost caused a panic.

Quickly the three men set to work to prepare for the coming of the scout.

Their horses were led away into the timber, the fire was raked together, but not so as to give too much light, and the face and form of the dead man was looked over.

He was beardless, save for several days' growth, his hair was short, and he was dressed in a cavalry uniform and wore a black slouch army hat.

"He's about my size," said Jake.

"Yas."

"An' I hain't got no beard ter speak of."

"No."

"I guess it means me ter put on his uniform and do ther work."

"That's what it does. You be ther one ter play soger, Jake, and show yerself, and we'll be back in ther shadder and chip in our shots, too."

"All right, 'cause Buffalo Bill are not easy put under ther ground," remarked Jake Strong.

The body of the soldier was then stripped of its uniform, hat, and boots, and unmindful of the red stain upon the coat, Jake Strong put the things on, though the boots were large for him, as he had small hands and feet.

"I as heard it were bad luck ter wear dead folks' clothes," was Slippery Ike's cheerful suggestion as he watched his comrade metamorphose himself into a soldier as far as the uniform went.

"Shut up, you fool, or you'll hev ter do ther killin' of Buffalo Bill," whispered Denver, and Ike was immediately silent.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SLIPPERY JAKE'S MISTAKE.

Jake Strong had overheard the remarks of Slippery Ike, intended as an aside for Denver.

He shuddered in spite of himself.

It appeared to make him feel painfully uncomfortable.

This feeling developed into anger, and he turned upon Ike and said:

"Yer blamed fool, what did yer say thet fer?"

"I has heerd it."

"What if yer hed? What did yer tell me fer?"

"I didn't. I told Denver."

"Yer meant me ter hear it."

"I didn't."

"Yer lies."

"Hes it skeert yer?"

"No, I hain't one ter skeer easy."

"What is yer makin' sich a row about then?"

hev bad luck, and if I does it means bad luck fer all of us."

Slippery Ike shivered.

But he saw that Jake Strong was really frightened at his remark and he was pleased to have him so.

He did not like the way that Jake had pocketed the watch and other belongings of the dead soldier, and as he saw that there was a case of long division, and he and Denver could take care of Buffalo Bill, as they held every advantage, he was willing to have a row so that he got the best of it.

This he expected to do by getting the drop on Jake, and reducing the trio to two.

Slippery Ike was only brave when the advantage was all his own.

Now he was planning to have it come his way, for he did not think Jake Strong would attempt to kill him in a quarrel.

So he determined to push matters and act quickly.

And he prepared accordingly.

But he did not know Jake Strong so well as he thought he did.

Strong turned angrily upon him, saying:

"Ther more I thinks of it ther more mad I gits, and my granddaddy told me ef yer did anything thet were unlucky yer must do nuthin' ter change it, and as you jist made it bad fer me, Slippery Ike, I'll jist still your blamed tongue fer yer."

He had his hand on his revolver now, and Slippery Ike saw that he had reckoned wrong.

His face turned white and with trembling hand he tried to draw a weapon, for he realized that Jake Strong intended to kill him.

His revolver hung in his belt, and as he saw the weapon of Jake Strong covered him he cried out:

"Don't kill me, Jake!"

The shot came with the name of the man upon his lips, and the bullet crashed through the head of Slippery Ike.

Hardly waiting to see the result of his shot Jake Strong turned upon Denver and cried:

"Didn't I do right, pard, fer it takes off ther spell o' bad luck he put upon us?"

"I thinks you did jist right, Jake."

The answer came very calmly, but Denver slyly let go his revolver which he had evidently intended to use.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ALL READY FOR THE SCOUT.

"I wasn't previous enuff. I kin wait," said Denver as he saw that the quick turn upon him of Jake Strong had spoiled his little game whatever it was.

"Yer see he brought it upon himself, pard," said Jake.

"I heerd him."

"An' though I hate ter kill a pard, he put a spell of bad luck on me I hed ter git off."

"So he died."

"And thet tuk it off."

"Yas, death settles it," and Denver walked over to where Ike lay, all in a heap, as he sunk down at the deadly shot of his pard.

"We'll jist put him over here in ther timber along with ther soger," said Denver.

"You do it, fer I hates ter tech dead bodies."

"I'll do it," and Denver dragged the body a few paces to where the soldier lay.

"I guesses we better git ready fer work, Pard Jake, fer Buffalo Bill can't be many miles off."

"No, he can't."

"I hopes he didn't hear thet shot."

"I guesses not, fer this are up a little canyon, yer knows."

"Yas. But we is but two now, Denver."

"Yas, it's easier ter divide ther booty atween two," and Denver saw that Jake Strong was watching him all the time.

"It is, but we can make no mistake

"I has heerd so."

"They do say he has been tackled by half a dozen men and wiped out ther lot."

"Yas, and thet he hev got away with half a hundren Injuns."

"My Lord!"

"I doesn't believe all I hears about him."

"Nor do I. But he has a record no other man on ther plains hev got."

"So he has. And they do say he never picked a quarrel with any man or drawed a gun without good reason."

"And used it when he drawed it."

"Every time. The Government allers serds him ter a bad country where desperadoes run things too high."

"Yas, and he quiets 'em, too."

"He does."

"And ther whole army swears by him."

"Men and officers, all of 'em, does."

"Oh, he's a dandy, is Buffalo Bill."

"And allers escapes death, as though Providence he app'inted a special guide and guard to look out fer him."

"You is right—but, say, pard."

"Well?"

"If we keeps on a tellin' all thet Buffalo Bill hev done an' kin do, we'll nigh about skeer ourselves ter death about ther time he gits here."

"You is right, and I don't believe half is true we hears about him."

"No more do I, and he's only a man."

"And bullets kill evry time when sent right."

"They does."

"And ours is ter go right."

"An' no mistake."

"Well, jist what is your idea, pard, fer us ter act on?"

It was evident that the two men had worked themselves into a fever of excitement by their talk of Buffalo Bill's prowess.

So answering the question of Denver, Jake Strong said in a whisper:

"I'll sit here until we hears him coming."

"Then I'll show myself as thet soger did ter me, and when he gits close up we'll both shoot tergether."

"Yas."

"You be right thar in ther timber, and draw yer steady bead upon his head, while, as I'll hev ter shoot quick, I'll aim at his heart."

"And keep pumpin' in ther lead until we knows Buffalo Bill is dead fer keeps."

"Yes."

"Well, I is ready."

"Me too."

The two men turned to take their stands, just as a shot rang out near them.

CHAPTER XXXV.

DANGER AHEAD.

Buffalo Bill rode along the trail fully aware that there might be danger ahead.

After getting well away from Advance City, having left the last cabin behind him, he halted where the trail was narrow, running through a small vale.

Taking from his pocket a match, he lighted a very small bull's-eye lantern and turned its searching fiery eye full down upon the trail ahead of him.

Each foot of it was looked over carefully for a rod or more.

"As I thought, several horsemen have passed this way."

"There are the fresh tracks of three horses, and they are not ahead of me an hour."

"Let me see, Wash Waring said that, though they tried to keep it dark, the man I killed was one of a gang of four, and he was surprised that his comrades did not attempt to avenge him."

"They preferred to avenge it secretly, I see, for one from four leaves three, and they are ahead of me."

"Fortunately, the old trail runs parallel with this, and not half a mile away, so I'll take that, though it is a rough one, until I get near where I left Ed Canyon, for if I am right about the

very far from Advance City to ambush me."

He put out his lantern, remounted, and made his way obliquely to the old trail. Along this he pressed with no dread of running upon foes.

Thus the time passed, the miles went by, and at last the scout decided to turn into the new trail once more.

He knew he could not be very far away from the soldier courier's camp.

As he reached the trail he again dismounted, lighted his little bull's-eye lantern, and turned its glow upon the ground.

"Ah! They are still ahead.

"I don't exactly understand this, unless they are not after me, but are going northward.

"Still, why should they leave at night?

"Their doing so is too suspicious to make me feel secure.

"Covey cannot be a mile from here, and they may have seen his light.

"I hope no harm has befallen him, but I'll hide my horses and go ahead on foot, for it will not do to risk too much just now."

He led the horses off the trail, staked them out, and was just starting ahead on foot, when, in quick succession, three shots were heard in the distance.

"Ah! That is a timely warning, indeed.

"It comes from Covey's camp, too, I am sure.

"He doubtless opened on them, not being caught asleep.

"There were three shots, too.

"I wonder if he turned the tables upon them and got the three of them?

"I'll take my horses along with me to have them near if wanted."

With this he returned for his horses, and going on foot, with one on each side of him as a precaution should he run upon an ambush, he walked briskly on once more.

In half a mile's distance he came upon a view of the camp fire.

"Yes, that is it, and I have heard no further trouble there."

For some distance further he went, and then halted and led the horses off of the trail.

He was now within a few hundred yards of the lone camp.

Hitching the animals, he went forward on foot, his rifle across his arm, ready for use.

He skirted along the timber on the hillside of the canyon, and was within a hundred yards of the camp fire when a single shot was heard.

And he heard voices also.

"What under the sun is going on there in that camp, I wonder?

"Could Ed Covey be in trouble, for I don't just understand those shots.

"I'll take a clearer look and chip in if I am needed."

With this Buffalo Bill crept nearer still to the little camp.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ON HAND WHEN WANTED.

Buffalo Bill had learned the trick from his association with Indians to creep through underbrush as noiselessly as a panther.

He did so now and soon came within a few yards of the camp fire.

He had heard talking, but could not detect what was said.

Nearer and nearer he drew until putting out his hand he touched a human face.

The face was cold.

He ran his hand over face and form and found that the latter had been stripped of its outer clothing and boots.

Then the scout found that there was blood on the body.

His hand in reaching out came upon another body.

This face and form were still warm.

There was a wound in the forehead.

This body was not undressed.

"I fear that poor Ed Covey is the dead one I first felt."

It was very dark in the timber where the two bodies lay.

The camp fire was about fifty feet away, and the voices heard were in low tones.

The fire burned low, so gave a bright glow rather than light, and Buffalo Bill saw two forms pass near.

One of them he could see was in uniform.

The other disappeared in the shadow of the timber to one side.

But the scout heard now the words:

"And keep pumpin' in ther lead until we knows Buffalo Bill is dead fer keeps."

He saw the plot at a glance.

Ed Covey, the soldier courier, had been killed, the man he saw in uniform was playing a part to represent him, and for the purpose of leading him, Buffalo Bill, into a trap.

The men had acted most cleverly indeed.

But who was the dead man lying by Ed Covey?

It must be one of the trio whom the soldier courier had killed, thought Buffalo Bill.

The face of the scout grew hard and stern.

He saw two foes, there might be more, but if there were he would fight then and there.

He would avenge his soldier friend, and catch the men in the trap they were setting for him.

He was in a position where he could see the man in uniform, and the other had crouched down in the timber some paces away.

They little dreamed that the one they were awaiting the arrival of was so near.

They were looking for him.

He was determined they should find him.

He had two large trees near him for shelter, should there be others than those he had seen.

But he did not believe there were others, yet had there been he was ready to meet them.

So wrought up was Buffalo Bill just then at the murder of his friend Ed Covey, for he felt that a cowardly murder it had been, and the plot of the two murderers to kill him, that he was in a merciless mood just then, and he would not have counted odds.

For a while Jake Strong kept quiet.

But he soon grew impatient and restlessly began to pace to and fro.

"Better lie low and let him think you is asleep as he comes up," called out Denver.

"Why don't he come along, fer I is gettin' anxious."

"Don't know."

"Does yer think he might hev been closer upon us than we thought and heerd our shootin'?"

"Your shootin' yer mean, pard, fer I hain't pulled trigger ter-night."

"Dang it, don't chop me us so, fer hain't we both in the same box?"

"Say, Pard Jake, don't talk of bein' in boxes, fer it sounds too coffin like."

Jake Strong uttered an oath and still continued his pacing to and fro.

"I is afraid he might hev heerd thet shot."

"When yer kilt Pard Slippery Ike?"

"Of course, fer what other shot c'u'd I mean save ther one when I laid Ike low fer what he did?"

"I thought yer might hev meant ther time yer shot ther soger."

"I put three into him."

"An' Buffalo Bill might hev heerd them."

"Oh, Lordy!"

"If he did then our game is lost."

"Sure."

"I only wishes he was here."

Hardly had the wish been uttered by Jake Strong when clear and startling came the words:

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE LAST OF THE FOUR.

At the startling response of Buffalo Bill to the wish of Jake Strong, there came the sound of a fall from over where Denver stood in the timber, while with a frightened exclamation and bitter oath the desperado in uniform turned at bay.

He fired quickly at random toward the spot from whence the sound of Buffalo Bill's voice had come.

But following the flash of his revolver came another.

It was the answering shot from Buffalo Bill, and the bullet caught the man as he was springing toward the shelter of some timber.

He fell with a heavy thud that told the scout that his aim had been true.

But where was the other man?

Buffalo Bill had heard a fall, yet he knew that the man was not hurt, for then no weapon had been fired.

He felt that it was a trick to escape or kill him and he knew that he must be cautious.

With the fall of Jake Strong he had crouched down again.

Jake lay in full view of the firelight.

He was not to be feared.

But his partner?

Toward him the scout now directed his full attention.

No sound came from the direction he knew him to be in.

Noiselessly Buffalo Bill begun to flank around to get behind and near him.

In a couple of minutes he had gotten the man between him and the firelight.

Then he crept nearer.

To his surprise he saw an outstretched form.

There was just light enough for him to see that the man lay on his back, his arms lying out limp and motionless.

"Could he have fell on his knife and killed himself, or did I scare him to death?"

With this Buffalo Bill drew nearer, his revolver covering Denver to kill him did he attempt any trickery.

And the scout had still his eye on the silent form of Jake Strong, for no one knew better than he that all shots were not fatal.

A moment more and the revolver of the scout pressed against the temple of Denver.

"I've got the trump card, pard, so the game's mine."

There was no reply, no movement.

"Scared to death, I verily believe—no, he's breathing."

"He don't seem to be hurt, and—"

"I say, pard, what's the matter?"

The man moaned.

Taking his weapons from him and seeing that he had not fallen on his knife, that he was unable to find any wound about him, Buffalo Bill shook him hard, and taking from his pocket a pair of small steel linked manacles slipped them upon his wrist.

Suddenly the man moved uneasily and then asked:

"What is it? Whar am I, pard?"

"By jove! If you were not so badly scared that you fainted; I'll give it up," and Buffalo Bill broke out into a hearty laugh.

"I'm subject ter sich attacks," growled Denver.

"When you get scared?"

"You is Buffalo Bill?"

"Yes."

"Where's my pard, Jake?"

"Gone."

"Gone? Where?" eagerly asked Denver with a ray of hope.

Buffalo Bill silently pointed downward and said:

"He is dead."

"Ah, my poor pard."

"My sympathy is for you, the living, for he is out of his misery."

"What's ther matter with me?"

"Well, you are my prisoner in the first place."

"What fer?"

"I hain't done nuthin'."

"You did not get the chance, but you were caught in some mighty bad company, and I know enough to hang you."

Denver groaned.

For a moment it flashed upon him that Jake Strong did have the advantage of him, that he was really the best off.

"Come, I have lost time enough over you and your gang, and I wish to see just what you have been up to, but first I intend to make you perfectly safe for future reference," and Buffalo Bill securely bound his prisoner's feet beyond all chance of escape.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE SCOUT'S CAMP.

Once his prisoner was secure and Jake Strong still lay where he had fallen, Buffalo Bill felt no dread of further trouble then, so decided to have a better view of the situation.

To do this he threw wood on the fire, which the poor soldier had gathered for his return, and then brought his prisoner into the full light, making him secure to a tree.

"Well, I have seen your ugly face in Advance City and only to-night, too."

"Now, there were four of you?"

Denver did not speak at first, but then said:

"No, I was not one of 'em, fer I come along not knowing what they was goin' ter do."

"You are as accomplished a liar as you are a scoundrel, for I happened to overhear enough of your talk to know you were as deep in the plot as any of them."

"Don't lie to me, for it will do no good."

"You belonged to a gang of four, one of whom I killed as he fired at Dart Deering, another who lies there, and whom I was forced to shoot as he did not obey my command, but opened on me."

"You are the third, and the fourth lies in the timber alongside of my poor soldier friend, Ed Covey."

"You see I am posted."

Denver was silent and Buffalo Bill turned the body of Jake Strong over and looked at him:

"Yes, I have seen him, too."

Then he went into the timber and returned with the body of Slippery Ike.

"Shot in a family quarrel, eh?"

"Well, the four of you are all present or accounted for, as we say at roll call in the army."

His next move was to bring the body of the soldier into the light.

"Poor Ed, little did I think I'd not see you alive again."

Tenderly the scout put the body back in the timber and covered it with one of the soldier's own blankets from his bed.

The other bodies were placed near and also decently covered with a blanket.

Then Buffalo Bill turned again to the prisoner, who was pallid faced, wretched and silent, though he watched the scout's every move.

"Where are your horses?"

No answer.

"If you do not answer I'll find a way to make you, for after your red work I am not to be trifled with."

Denver evidently believed this, for he replied:

"They is yonder in ther timber."

The scout arose and walked away.

He soon found the horses and staked them out where he had seen the soldier's horse feeding when he crept up to the camp.

This done he saw that his prisoner was all right, and then walked away to fetch his own horses.

He found them where he had left them, and mounting his own animal he went rapidly back to the camp.

They were staked out also with the others, more wood was thrown upon the fire, and, looking at his watch, Buffalo Bill said:

circumstances, so we can get considerable sleep, and I am tired.

"I'll spread your blankets for you, but if you give me any trouble by attempting to escape, I shall shoot you, that is all."

"I won't move," said Denver earnestly.

The bed was spread and the prisoner turned in, but whether to sleep or not he knew best, with the dread of his fate in his heart and brain.

Spreading his own blankets Buffalo Bill threw himself upon them, and in an instant it seemed was asleep, so well trained were his senses to obey his iron will.

That his soldier friend had been murdered and lay dead near him, that two other forms cold in death were there also, that a prisoner was within his reach, and he had been forced to take human life a short hour before, did not disturb him when he willed that it should not.

He knew that there was a long trail before him, that dangers beset him, but having had a long and hard day and night of it, he drove exciting memories from his mind, banished cruel memories, and went to sleep, for he felt the need of it.

The prisoner heard his steady breathing, but could hardly believe the man of iron was asleep.

He thought that he was "playing possum" just to see after he had released him of the bonds about his feet, though still leaving his wrists manacled, if he would attempt to escape.

Longing to do so, he decided to move to tell how securely the scout slept, if sleeping he was.

So he moved, as though to turn in his blankets.

Instantly the movement awakened Buffalo Bill, who was alert to the situation on the instant, for he said sternly:

"Go slow, there, pard, if you are intending to make a bolt, for you will get the worst of it."

Denver still moved, muttered something as though half awake, and relapsed into silence.

Instantly Buffalo Bill arose, wrapped his lariat around the blanketed form, carried the ends to his own bed, and again dropped off to sleep quickly.

"That man is the very devil—it's no go," mused Denver, and he either went to sleep then himself or pretended to do so.

There was no further disturbance of the scout's slumbers, the dawn came, and when the east began to grow radiant with the coming up of the sun, Buffalo Bill awoke, sprung to his feet, and said:

"Good morning, pard."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

BUFFALO BILL'S LETTER.

The scout awoke refreshed and ready to grapple with the hard work of the day.

His face was stern as he recalled the death of his friend, but he said nothing, only glancing at his prisoner as he walked away to lead the horses to water and change their grazing ground.

To his surprise he saw that the courier's horse was but little lame, and glancing at his hoof he saw that the rider had had the iron shoe off and doctored the foot.

"I guess you'll be all right to travel," he muttered, and then made his way back to the fire.

Denver still lay silent and Buffalo Bill said:

"Say, pard, are you trying to sleep like your two pards yonder?"

"I only wish I was asleep as they are—my last sleep."

Buffalo Bill could not but feel a pity for the man and replied:

"Well, it is a sleep we must all take some day, but how soon none of us can tell."

"But I'm getting breakfast now and a good meal will soon make you feel all right."

"One must think of what life he leads when he has the chance to choose the good from the bad."

"Say, you have a big heart, men say, Buffalo Bill."

"It fits my body all right, I find."

"Will you let me go free?"

"No."

"What good will my death do you?"

"You are not dead yet."

"But I will be when you take me to the fort."

"I do not intend to take you to the fort."

"Where then?" eagerly asked the man.

"I intend to send you back to Advance City."

"Send me?"

"Yes."

"Not take me?"

"No, for I must go on my way."

"How can you send me?"

"I'll tell you how."

"I have no time to bury these dead pards of yours or my soldier friend, so I shall have to ask Landlord Waring to do it for me."

"As how?"

"Your horses all came from Advance City, so will know the way home, and I will mount you on one, securing you to him, will tie the dead bodies on the others, make the outfit fast together, and write a letter to Waring and send it by you."

"I hain't no mail rider."

"You don't wish to carry a letter, then?"

"And I hain't going ter do it, and hang myself fer being obligin'."

Buffalo Bill smiled at the way Denver put it, but replied:

"It is asking too much of a man to carry his own conviction in a letter, so I will simply not ask it but find a way to get it there by other means."

"Ther dead hain't carryin' nuthin'."

The scout made no reply, but having breakfast ready gave the prisoner a good meal, taking the manacles off of his wrists so that he would be comfortable.

Denver ate heartily, for the scout had baked some potatoes in the ashes, fried some ham, broiled an antelope steak, made a hoe cake, while he had also prepared a pot of excellent coffee.

"You're as good a cook as you is a shot," said Denver.

"I have had much practice in both arts," was the reply.

Breakfast over with, the dishes were washed up and put away, the prisoner being again manacled.

Then the horses were all brought up and saddled, the dead bodies being wrapped in their blankets, Denver anxiously watching every movement of the scout.

Taking a pencil and paper from his pocket Buffalo Bill wrote:

"To Magistrate Wash Waring,

Advance City:

"Sir:

"I desire to notify you hereby that three men left your settlement last night to waylay me on the trail, to get the booty I was supposed to carry."

"The three men are along, two dead, the other alive and a prisoner."

"They surprised Ed Covey, the soldier-courier, in his camp, killed him, and one of them—now dead—putting his uniform on, arranged to entrap me upon my coming to camp."

"I was not tricked as the accompanying outfit shows."

"The prisoner will doubtless tell you what more you would learn of the affair."

"He is the last one of four of your hardest citizens, one being Shadow Tom, who departed this life just outside of the Good Luck Saloon early last night."

"I send the body of my unfortunate friend Covey along, asking you to bury it, as I am pressed for time."

"Please keep his horse and equipments

citizens, and having no desire for his company, I return him to you.

"Very sincerely yours,

"WILLIAM F. CODY,

"Buffalo Bill,

"Chief of Scouts U. S. Army."

Such was Buffalo Bill's letter, and Denver's face wore a look of terror as he saw the scout writing it, while he said aloud: "That blamed writing will hang me."

CHAPTER XL.

A WEIRD PROCESSION.

His letter finished, the scout turned and read it to Denver, who breathed more freely, for he had suspected that Buffalo Bill had made the request to hang him.

"Thet hain't so bad, an' ef I kin git in when thar hain't many around, maybe they won't hang me."

"The magistrate will decide upon your punishment, and he is a just man, while he'll protect you I feel assured."

"Maybe yes, maybe no. Them folks of Advance City is all-fired fond of seeing a hangin'."

"I quite agree with you there, but I trust you will be given fair play."

"I have done only my duty, and I can do nothing more."

The bodies were then strapped across the backs of the horses, wrapped in their blankets as they were.

The soldier was firmly tied upon his saddle and the scout was glad to see that his horse was not very lame.

Denver was aided to mount his horse, and his feet were tied beneath the animal, his hands manacled and made fast to the saddle horn.

Then Buffalo Bill carefully pinned the closely written sheet of paper upon the breast of the prisoner, who muttered sullenly:

"I is carryin' yer letter arter all."

"Yes, sir, as you remarked the dead cannot carry it."

Denver's horse was then put in the lead, and with their stake ropes the other animals were tied each one to the other's tail, the one with the soldier's body being in the rear.

This done the scout saddled his horse and pack horse, saw that the weapons of the men all hung on their saddle horns, save Denver's, and mounting led the strange outfit down the little valley to the trail.

"Well, pard, I go my way from here, you go yours."

"I guess mine will be the longest trail."

"Not to Advance City."

"No, if I stops thar."

"Where do you expect to go?"

"Further on."

"Where?"

"Up to ther limb of a tree, then rest inter ther graveyard—from thar, God only knows."

The answer was pathetic and Buffalo Bill felt it.

But he replied:

"I send you to Wash Waring, for I can do nothing else, and he will be merciful, though your own conscience tells you that you deserve little mercy."

"But good-by," and the scout started the prisoner's horse on the trail, the others of course following, led as they were.

He started them in a walk and called out:

"They will go there all right."

"I is painfully stuck on ther idee they will," came back the reply.

Turning in his saddle as well as he could after going some distance, Denver looked back on the trail and saw the scout still seated on his horse watching him.

When he next looked back the scout was not there; he had started upon his trail also.

Then the full danger of his own situation flashed upon him in all its horror.

His face became livid, his lips quivered, and suddenly he burst forth in a

The voice rang loudly along the trail, and the man turned his head to see if the scout heard and was coming.

But Buffalo Bill was a mile away and going briskly on his trail, and, loud as it was, the terror-stricken voice of the unfortunate man did not reach his ears.

As he grew hoarse from calling the man stopped his cries and said piteously:

"He is too far off, but I hoped he would come back to me, and I would beg him so hard to let me go."

"I would be his slave if he only would, and I believes he would, fer he is good and not merciless as I have been."

"Now I knows it; I sees it all, that I is goin' to my doom."

"I deserves it, I knows, for I has been so bad, so bad, and I hed it in me ter make a good man."

"How hard my poor mother tried ter show me ther right way, only I w'u'dn't mind her, and father tole me I was goin' ter ruin," and the man burst into tears as the full force of his past sinful life flashed upon him in all its bitterness.

"In vain then he tried to halt his horse, to turn him from the trail, hoping to meet some one that would set him free."

The horse held on steadily and followed without swerving the trail to Advance City.

CHAPTER XLI.

TOWARD THE SETTING SUN.

Rested by several days in camp, the people and animals of Don Ellwardo's wagon train pulled out quite briskly on the march toward the setting sun country, as they all spoke of the far western country toward which their faces were turned.

They had made all needed repairs to vehicles and harness, horses had been shod, guns and revolvers cleaned and reloaded; the stock of provisions replenished and all arrangements made for thorough discipline in camp and on the trail, now that they were pushing out into a land where danger would be their daily and nightly companion.

The people were all glad, too, to have secured the valuable services of Dart Deering as guide.

His adventure when coming to them had been told through the train, and the rescue of Idolene the day before was also known, so that he came with a good record.

He had been introduced by Don Ellwardo to the people of the train, and though they thought him a trifle stern and a man of few words, they felt that he was one who knew his business and did it.

He went off to the head of the train, setting the pace they were to travel, and telling them that it would be a fifteen-mile pull to where they camped for dinner, and a little more to the night camp, for he expected to average twenty-five miles a day, more or less, according to the trail being good or bad, and the camping places they would find.

"I shall keep well ahead, sir, say from two to four miles, so I will be able to prevent the train running into danger."

"But I will mark the way where the trail is secure, and can be readily reached if needed, while I will also be glad to have any company ride ahead with me when there is no danger," said the guide.

"We shall be glad to take advantage of your invitation, I assure you, Mr. Deering."

"And let me suggest, sir, that you let a couple of good men follow a mile or so in the rear, or your son and a companion will be as well, if you think best, only they must be on the alert and not be surprised by redskins or road-agents."

"I will post them about this and at once."

"Mora and his comrades will be glad to do this duty, and will keep their eyes open I assure you."

"The train must also be ready, sir, to

or circle, and the men be prepared to resist attack."

"I will see to it, Guide Deering, and drill them in the work, so they will know just what to do."

"It is a good idea, sir, but I look for no trouble, at least for several days, until we get well away from Last Resort and this line of settlements."

"I trust we will get through all right, for there is much at stake, I assure you, guide, and, in a measure, I am responsible for the going of all on this long trail and into an unknown land."

"Many others have done so, and with safety, but you will pardon me if I say it was wrong for you to bring much treasure along."

"How is that?"

"The rumor has gone ahead of you that you have quite a sum of gold along with the train."

"Indeed! I hardly know how such a story could have gotten out, for I have been most particular to have it reported that we had nothing more than our household belongings."

"Still it is believed otherwise, Don Ellwardo."

"I am sorry, indeed."

"Then it is not so, sir, that you have treasures along, and I am glad to learn it," and the guide seemed relieved.

"Oh, yes, Senor Deering; it is true that I have most valuable treasures along, and which I will risk life to protect; but sorry I am that this idea of our carrying golden treasure has gotten about, for I can readily see how it will put lawless men upon our track."

"It will, sir, but still I believe I can guide you in safety to your destination, though we must expect to have a few brushes with the Indians on our way, and perhaps with a band of road-agents, for this is no picnic, I assure you, to go upon."

"I well understand that."

"Still, you have a good lot of fighting men, the boys are able and brave allies, and the women of your party seem, one and all, to possess nerve, endurance, and determination to sustain their defenders."

"They do, indeed; but there comes my daughter to the front, and let me tell you, Guide Deering, you will find in her a girl with the nerve of a man, an able ally on our march."

"I have no doubt of it, sir."

CHAPTER XLII.

A FAIR HUNTER.

The guide had looked back over the trail at the Don's remark, and saw Idolene approaching at a canter.

She was not mounted on Path Finder preferring to give him a rest on the march until he wholly recovered from his lameness.

Instead she rode a fine animal that was her mother's saddle horse.

The train had been one the move for several hours, and having seen her father go to the front with the guide, she decided to join them.

She took her rifle along to bring down any game that might be acceptable, for she was a fine shot.

"My daughter is a fine shot, sir, and has seen much of border life in the Southwest in her younger years, so this is not new to her, and she is fond of the wild, outdoor life."

"I should judge so, sir. She handles a rifle well and rides with great skill and daring, I notice."

"She should, from her teaching and experience."

"Her mother was an American army officer's daughter, and spent much of her life in frontier forts, while I was a soldier in Mexico, so that both our children, Idolene and Mora, come naturally by their love of the wild life of the Far West."

"Yet it appears strange to me, sir, that with education of a superior order, refinement, and wealth that you and your fam-

cial life of the city for the rude life of an unknown country."

"My dear Senor Deering, there are circumstances in our lives that shape them differently from what we will, destinies that lead us apart from the path we would select to follow, and such has driven me into this land—to find a home and a fortune such as I consider worthy of those I love and live for."

Before the guide could reply to this, and which was spoken by the Don in a very impressive manner, Idolene overtook them, reining her horse back to a walk, and at her father's side.

She was looking even more beautiful than was her wont, with her flushed face and sparkling eyes, while her habit of dark gray, trimmed with military braid, fitted her faultless figure to perfection.

Her head was shaded by a slouch hat, upon the front of which was an ornament of tiny flags, the staffs covered, one with the Mexican flag in honor of her father, the other the Stars and Stripes that represented her own and her mother's native land.

Gauntlet gloves covered her small hands, her dark hair was braided close about her head, and at her saddle horn hung a small repeating rifle.

"Did you not hear my rifle shot, Senors?" she asked as she gave a military salute upon riding up and joining her father and the guide.

Both expressed astonishment that they had not.

"I shot a fine deer back on the trail a mile, and left him for the train people to pick up.

"Then I came on to join you, father, as I knew you came to the front, and we have generally been comrades on the march."

"I saw several deer, but they were well off the trail, so I did not try for one, expecting to get a closer shot during the morning, for game is plentiful here.

"I congratulate you, Miss Ellwardo," said the guide courteously, adding:

"I expected to be hunter as well as guide, but if you are fond of the sport, I will be glad to have you honor me with your company whenever you care to ride ahead, and there is no danger for you."

"I thank you, Mr. Deering, and shall avail myself of the opportunity, for I am devoted to hunting, and my brother and myself have pretty well kept the train supplied as we came along.

"But you appear to anticipate danger ahead, sir."

"We are going through an Indian country, Miss Ellwardo, and, though we will not, I hope, have to deal with any large force, we will see small bands of redskins, and they will haunt our trail and pick off any one they can get a chance to capture or kill, so it will not be safe for you to go off the line of march."

"And, my child, Guide Deering says also that we may come upon a band of road-agents, and you have already had an opportunity to know what they are, so I beg you to be careful."

"I will, father."

"And if you leave the train let it only be on the trail between it and our guide, for you need not look for game out here."

"No, it will cross our trail. Buffalo, deer, elk, and antelope, not to speak of rabbits, squirrels, birds, and the fish to be found in the streams when we camp.

"You will find all the sport you wish, Miss Ellwardo," said the guide with the enthusiasm of the true huntsman.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE BOY GUARD.

The prospect of finding plenty of game, four-footed and feathered, and having a chance to catch fish when camped, was a pleasant anticipation to Idolene, as she knew it would be to her young brother, Mora.

She realized fully that their way would be fraught with danger, and she promised

sight of the trail between the guide ahead and the following train.

Assured that she would keep her word, the Don dropped back to allow the wagons to overtake him, that he might put Mora and a companion on guard in the rear, and at once begin to drill the people in what would have to be done in case of any alarm from Indians or outlaws, though he anticipated no trouble of that kind for several days, unless the band that attempted to capture Idolene should follow them on mischief bent.

Feeling that the guide would impress upon Idolene the danger she would incur by exposing herself unnecessarily, the Don left her with the man upon whom the hopes of all of the party were centered, and sat down to await the coming up of the train.

In half an hour they did so, and they had found and dressed the fine deer Idolene had shot.

"Don't be anxious, wife, for Idolene is ahead with the guide," he called out, as he saw Mrs. Ellwardo's face press anxiously from the ambulance at him.

"It is all right, then; but I knew that she had ridden on ahead, and we heard her rifle, but soon discovered that she had brought down some game for us."

"Yes, and the guide has promised her plenty of sport."

"Does he dread much danger on our march?"

"He does not appear to, yet has advised me to take every precaution not to be surprised, and I have a duty for Mora and one of his boy pards to perform," and the Don looked up his young son, finding him near the rear of the train, which was well stretched out on the trail.

"Mora, I have a duty for you to perform each day."

"I am ready, father," answered the handsome boy, and his fine face beamed with delight.

He was well grown for his years, had a fine, willowy form, and his face wore a look of resolution, intelligence, and daring very decidedly stamped for one of his years.

Mora was known to be a most expert horseman, could throw a lasso unerringly, was an athlete and also a crack shot.

He was most popular with all in the train, and the boy hero of his companions, who acknowledged him their leader most willingly.

"Our guide thinks it well to keep a couple of guards in the rear of our train, say about a mile or so back, to report any Indians or outlaws who might be following us."

"I'd like to be one, sir."

"It is just what I wish you to be, my son."

"You can select each day one from among your little band to be with you, and I will give you a good field glass, and at every rise you come to, where you can get a good look back over the trail, you must from a point where you are unseen yourself look back to see if you can detect any foes after us."

"I will, sir."

"You must also keep a bright lookout on either side to see that there are no flankers, and when the train goes into camp you remain behind until nightfall and then come on."

"Yes, sir."

"Should you make any discovery, see either Indian or white man, you are to send the one with you at once after the train to report the fact to me, for we must take no chances, my son, in this land of peril."

"I understand, father, and will do just as I am told."

"I am sure of that, Mora, and you know if you see any game you are at liberty to kill it for the people, as I wish them to have all the fresh meats possible."

"Yes, sir, but I'll not be led away from my watching to look for game."

"That is right, only kill what comes

Mora, proud of the chance to hold so important a position as rear guard, at once got his boon pard among the boys, Harry Hartley, who was about his age, and, well mounted and armed, they stopped back and began to serve as rear guard, remaining fully two miles back and making a thorough search on either side and behind them as they went along.

CHAPTER XLIV.

AN UNFORTUNATE REPORT.

When Don Ellwardo left his daughter, Idolene, to ride on ahead with the guide, he was glad to have her learn all that she could of border marching and life.

He felt that it would help to reassure her, to give her confidence in herself, and this confidence she would bestow on others of the train, who were a little timid.

Mrs. Ellwardo was a woman of nerve, and her daughter had had a good example in her brave mother, and from early girlhood this had helped her.

In leaving Idolene with the guide Don Ellwardo also wished to show his trust in him and his appreciation of the services he had already tendered.

The guide certainly felt flattered at the Don's act, and that Idolene should remain with him.

"It is a long and hard trail before us, Miss Ellwardo, yet I believe that we will go through without serious trouble," said the guide.

"Oh, yes, I think so, for I never look for trouble until it comes, and then it is time to bother with it."

"Yes, and we have enough in this world without seeking it," and Idolene glanced into the man's face, for there was a certain something in his tone that struck her forcibly, a regret at looking back into the past, she thought.

Wishing to change the subject, she said quickly:

"By the way, I wish again to thank you for your great service to me yesterday, for you saved my life, indeed."

He did not reply, and Idolene continued:

"And you saved me from that evil-faced man, Red Rob, who was so persistent in his efforts to be our guide."

"I am glad to have served you as I did, Miss Ellwardo," replied the guide, and then he added:

"The only thing that troubles me about this expedition is that the fact is known that your father carries with him quite a treasure in gold, and old family jewelry and plate of great value."

"Indeed! And how did this report get out, Mr. Deering?" asked Idolene with surprise.

"It is hard to tell; but the rumor is abroad, and as you possess courage of no ordinary kind I do not mind saying to you, Miss Ellwardo, that it is this that I dread trouble from."

"I trust not, sir, though I regret that such a story should have been circulated," and Idolene added with a smile:

"But we must defend that valuable treasure as our lives, if an effort is made to rob us."

"Certainly."

"What do you think we have to fear particularly, Guide Deering?"

"Well, outlaws, and, doubtless, led by the man you spoke of, Red Rob, for he is a very desperate character, and the fact that this unfortunate report is abroad is my dread of trouble, for I fear little from redskin bands we may meet."

"We are on the trail for Flagstaff, Guide Deering, and must face whatever is before us as best we can."

"I will drop back now and await the wagons."

"I trust you will often honor me with your company, Miss Ellwardo."

"I will at times, thank you, for I expect to learn much on this trail from you," and with a wave of her hand she rode off to a rise near by, the guide con-

CHAPTER XLV.

FOES ABOUT.

Idolene Ellwardo was considerably worried, to judge from the expression upon her face, when she dropped back, leaving the guide to go on ahead alone, while she waited for the coming up of the wagon train, all of a couple miles back on the trail.

She seemed to be thinking of something that was not pleasant to contemplate.

The country was rolling, woodland and valley, with here and there an open stretch of country, across which she could look for miles.

Glancing behind her along the trail she could not see far in that direction, and the guide soon disappeared from her view, as he continued on his way.

Alone as she was she had no fear, and, after having held her horse in check for a few minutes she allowed him to continue on, though at a very slow walk.

But her face was troubled, and her words, for she mused aloud, revealed the cause.

"Upon one man's skill, upon one man's life, the lives and hopes of this whole wagon train hang.

"Threescore lives depending upon one.

"I have faith in his skill and courage, and yet I must confess I do not regard him with the same feeling I did at first.

"I trust him, and yet I dread what fate the future has in store for us.

"I only wish that that great scout, William Cody, could have been our guide.

"It would have seemed different to me then, though it is perhaps unkind for me to say so.

"Still, although I have only seen Guide Deering a few hours on the trail, I cannot but feel a dread of what is before us, though I believe he will do his duty in everything, only my first impression of him when he came to our camp with Buffalo Bill was not correct. I now am assured of, and it is this that worries me.

"Ah! This is a beautiful scene, indeed, and I must bring my sketchbook along with me each day, if we are to come across such views as this one."

She had ridden out of a pine forest, suddenly upon the brow of a hill that gave her a grand view of a valley upon her left.

A stream ran through it, hills were beyond, and timber mottles dotted the landscape here and there.

She could see the trail, faintly outlined along the base of the hills upon her right, and half a mile ahead upon it Guide Deering was just disappearing in some timber.

Ere he did so he halted his horse, wheeled in his saddle, and looked back over the trail, whether to see if she was in sight she could only guess.

She hesitated but a minute and then continued on.

Instantly Idolene came to a halt, drew a field glass from its case, where it hung at the cartel of her saddle, and turned it upon the guide.

He doubtless had seen her, for the glass revealed him going on through the timber until he soon after disappeared.

Then Idolene began to sweep the valley with her glass and became lost in admiration of the beautiful scene.

Suddenly she grasped the glass more tightly, her face changed color, and she muttered quickly:

"So there are foes about I see.

"And the guide passed here and did not see them.

"Shall I ride on and tell him, or await the coming up of the train and let my father know?

"I'll take a good look at them, now, for I do not believe they see me; no I am sure they do not, for I have a glass.

"But the guide has a glass, too, and I should think that he would have scanned this valley well.

"Had he done so he would have seen them, for they seem to be at rest there.

some great weight upon his mind," and thus musing Idolene continued to hold her glass upon the discovery she had made.

This discovery was a group of men over on the distant hillside across the valley standing by their horses.

There were three of them, and they seemed to be watching the trail on the side of the valley where she was, half in the shadow of the timber, out of which she had a moment before emerged.

"I must ride on and put the guide on his guard about these men," she said, and then came close behind her the words:

"Don't be skeered of me, Miss."

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE WRITTEN EVIDENCE.

The weird procession of a manacled prisoner, bound to his horse, and three other horses in lead and carrying dead bodies strapped upon their backs, continued on toward Advance City at a brisk walk.

The animals seemed to feel that there was relief ahead from their disagreeable burdens.

Seated on the rude piazza of his inn Wash Waring was reading an Eastern paper that had come by the morning stage, and groups of men were about looking over letters they had received, or also reading the news, which was well over a month old.

"Well, what in thunder is comin' thar?" cried a miner, and all eyes looked in the direction that he did.

They beheld the weird procession Buffalo Bill had started for Advance City.

As the horses came along they had been seen by a man here and there, who, impressed by the strangeness of the sight, at once fell in behind the last horse and followed.

In this way over a score of men had been picked up on the way to the inn, to where the leading horse seemed to be making his way, the others necessarily following.

Wash Waring had cast aside his paper and now stepped out to meet the horses, one of the men halting them.

"It's Denver!"

"What hev happened?"

"He's got ther story pinned on his chest thar."

"He is wearin' steel bracelets."

"And tied to his horse."

"T'others is wuss off, fer they is dead."

"Thar has been ther dickens ter pay back whar they come from."

Such were the comments that went around the crowd, while Denver flushed and paled by turns and looked the very picture of despair.

The blanketed forms strapped across the horses had their faces hidden, so were not known.

"Well, Denver, what has happened?" said Wash Waring, stepping to the side of his horse and reaching up to unpin the paper from his breast.

"Don't let 'em kill me," pleaded the man in a low tone.

"Men, take those bodies off the horses and put them on the piazza."

"There will be plenty of burying this afternoon, with those we already have," said Waring, and before reading the paper written him by Buffalo Bill, he began to untie the lariats that bound the prisoner to his horse.

"It strikes me that you have met Buffalo Bill, Denver," said Waring, as he saw the faces of the dead and recognized the soldier, as well as Jake Strong and Slippery Ike.

"I has met ther devil, fer thet scout are more than human, I believes," replied the prisoner earnestly.

Placing the bodies in a row and his prisoner by his side in the door of the inn, Wash Waring took the paper, which he had thrust into his pocket, and read it carefully over to himself.

cited, stood about awaiting the result of the landlord's perusal.

"Well, pard, I have a letter from Buffalo Bill, and Denver here brought it, as he could not help it.

"I will read it to you, and it is what I call a very modest story of what has been some very plucky work on the part of Buffalo Bill."

So saying, amid a deathlike silence, the magistrate, for he had now assumed that role, read Buffalo Bill's letter in a voice that all could hear.

As he concluded the last words a chorus of voices shouted:

"Hang him!"

Denver groaned in agony of spirit.

Then Wash Waring said:

"Men, death has reaped quite a heavy harvest in Advance City within the past twenty-four hours, for we have no less than five bodies here now awaiting burial this afternoon.

"There is no need to add to the death roll by hanging a man until we know fully his guilt, and hence I call upon Denver to tell his story."

"Hain't yer heard it from Buffalo Bill," asked the prisoner, with trembling voice, and not wishing to commit himself more, for he had been surprised at the very mild manner in which the scout had told the story of his guilt.

"Boys, he's told enough ter hang yer, and if thar is a little more weedin' out of sich as you is in Advance City, we'd be better off," said a voice, and the crowd roared out:

"Hang him!"

"Men, this man belonged to a band of four, and precious hard citizens I admit they were.

"Shadow Tom was killed, as you know, by Buffalo Bill, when he was trying to play the assassin.

"The other three sought to avenge their companion, and enrich themselves at the same time.

"Two more of them are now lying here dead, and the fourth, Denver, and the last of the band, is before you, and a prisoner.

"I wish to hear his story, for I have here the written statement of Buffalo Bill."

"Hang him first, and try him afterward," shouted a man, and again came the roar:

"Hang him!"

CHAPTER XLVII.

DENVER'S STORY.

Denver seemed to feel that his doom would be death by hanging, even though he said nothing himself about the affair that had happened.

But Wash Waring reassured him by the remark:

"Do not fear to tell your story, my man, and tell the whole truth about it, for it will be better for you.

"Plead guilty, as the letter of Buffalo Bill gives evidence that you are, and let us know your story.

"Now, prisoner, stand up."

Denver arose with an effort, and cast his eyes furtively and anxiously over the crowd.

It was very evident that he was terribly afraid to die, that at best he was an arrant coward.

"Speak, sir."

"Well, jedge, I did belong to ther band with them three dead men, makin' four of us.

"But Slippery Ike and me wasn't fer killin' and robbin', same as Jake Strong and Shadder Tom was, and we didn't believe in many of their ways.

"Tom, he had some grudge agin ther Gold Hunter—"

"Deering?"

"Yas, jedge, and so tried ter kill him, the rest of us wasn't in thet; but we did want to avenge Tom, and Jake said ter me and Ike ter come along and we'd jist capter Buffalo Bill, give him a big scare, slit his ears, and turn him loose, so he'd

must git a long way off from ther settlement, and be gone several days.

"Well, we run upon ther camp of the soger, and he opened onto us.

"Jake he shot back and kilt him, and said as how ther were ther place ter wait fer Buffalo Bill, and he put on ther soger's uniform, as you see.

"Well, Ike and me got ter thinkin' about ther way Jake hed kilt ther soger, and he might kill Buffalo Bill, and we decided thet wouldn't do, and we'd hev a talk with him, as it would raise ther deuce of a row.

"Ike he spoke up and he and Jake got inter quarrelin', and before I know'd what was comin' thar were a shootin' match.

"Poor Ike he were kilt, and Jake said ter me ef I wanted ter hev it out he were willin', and he'd play a lone hand with ther scout.

"I were mad at him fer killin' ther soger, and then poor Ike, but didn't hev ter say nuthin' afore suddenly Buffalo Bill called out of the bushes:

"Hands up thar!

"Jake he began shootin' and Buffalo Bill he shot once, fer thet were enough.

"Jake went down, and I held my hands up quick.

"He put ther irons on me, built up ther fire, spread my blankets and his, and went ter sleep.

"This mornin' he gave me a good breakfast, writ thet letter ter you, jedge, fixed up ther outfit as you seen, an' sent me here.

"Thet is ther whole truth, jedge and pards, so it be."

The prisoner had spoken earnestly and with an air of truth as he told his story.

"Hang him, jedge, fer bein' caught in bad company," said one.

"Don't disappoint us, jedge, of ther hangin', fer we hain't had none fer weeks and it'll git out o' fashion."

"I says hang him!"

"Me, too!"

Then came a number of voices:

"Hang him!"

"Silence! I am your chosen officer of the law, and I will hold him until I hear the full story of Buffalo Bill, for I believe the prisoner has told the truth," said Wash Waring.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE TOMB.

The determined stand of Wash Waring, the border judge, was not liked by some of the crowd, while others upheld him in the stand he had taken.

There were many who felt that death was too frequent a visitor stalking into their midst, that life was held too cheap.

These were the better element among the men of Advance City.

Then there were those who loved excitement.

The more desperate it was, the more they relished it.

These were the lawless characters of the settlement, the ones to fear.

They were the black sheep, guilty themselves, hence anxious to find another in the same way.

Looking over the crowd, Wash Waring picked out readily from his knowledge of them all, gained by close, severe, and long experience, the sheep from the goats.

He saw whom he would have to back him up, whom he would have to fight.

But he was not to be brow-beaten.

A man holding his position could not. If he weakened in the least his prestige was gone.

In a firm voice he said:

"Men, when you elected me to be your magistrate, and I believe the vote was a unanimous one, you decided that my word was to be law, that there was to be no jury trials.

"I have not, therefore, considered that this was a trial by jury, but that my verdict should stand, and stand it shall, unless some of you remove me from office by a bullet.

"But I am your magistrate, the judge of this prisoner's crime, and what shall be done with him.

"Who will decide that my word is not law, for I wish him to face me, and the climax be reached at once?"

With this the brave man stepped to the edge of the piazza and looked over the crowd, or rather at those whom he had already picked out as the mischief makers among them.

Several of the law and order men at once rallied to the support of their magistrate, and one called out:

"The word of Judge Waring goes here.

"How about it, pards?"

There was a wild cheer from the crowd, not a dissenting voice being raised.

Those who had been the trouble makers cheered also.

"I thank you, gentlemen, for the confidence you now show in me," and again came a cheer.

Turning to Denver, Waring continued:

"Prisoner, you are to be confined in the tomb until the coming of Buffalo Bill, when you shall be tried for your life.

"You will be well fed and cared for, while you know escape is impossible and no guard over you is necessary.

"I will lock you within there," and he led the prisoner to a cliff on the main street, in which was a large, dry cave.

Over the front of this had been built extending above and upon either side a barrier of massive hewn logs, set with a space of three inches between them for light and air.

In the centre was a narrow doorway, the door being three logs, bolted together, fitting in a slide and raised and lowered by a block and tackle of chains on the outside, the chain that drew them up being wound around a tree and doubly padlocked.

There were several beds, a table and chairs inside.

In such a place, the tomb, as it was called, there was no need of a guard.

On a board outside was painted the names of all who had been in there, their crimes and fate.

Locking Denver within, for he held the key, Wash Waring turned away, and going to the inn ordered breakfast sent to the prisoner.

Then he took out Buffalo Bill's letter to read it again.

To his surprise he found on the back of the page a P. S.

CHAPTER XLIX.

BUFFALO BILL'S POSTSCRIPT.

Wash Waring read Buffalo Bill's postscript with evident surprise.

It was written on the top of the other side of the sheet of paper, and had been folded in, so that he had missed seeing it.

It was short, to the point, and as follows:

"P. S. This can be rubbed out so that others cannot see it.

"This man is as guilty as the others, only I believe he knows a secret I wish to know, so do not let them hang him if you can prevent, but keep him for my return.

"If compelled to yield to the mob, persuade him to give you a full confession of his life, and jot it down for me.

"Particularly ask him who Ross Moore is? B. B."

This and the rest of the letter Wash Waring read over again and again carefully.

"Ross Moore! How strange that name should come into my life again, and out here.

"And Buffalo Bill asks me to question this man about him, to get a confession from him.

"Well, it is strange how I determined to save the man, feeling that I could make him useful to me.

"Now I find out that it was well that I took the determined stand that I did.

"He is secure there where he is, and I will take good care of him, for he may

tell me what I also would like to know.

"Ross Moore, your name again comes to my ears, and can it be that you also are to cross my path.

"If so, there can be but one end, your death or mine, for, broad as is our grand country, it is not large enough for both of us to live in—if you are yet alive, for I had believed otherwise.

"When the excitement over this last tragic affair is over, I must seek that prisoner, and have a talk with him.

"Now I must see to the burial of the dead, and that honest soldier shall not be made a parade of with the toughs who are to go to their graves this afternoon."

With this Wash Waring went in search of a man he wanted, had him make a single coffin, a luxury for the dead in Advance City, and the remains of Edward Covey, the soldier courier, killed in the discharge of his duty, were placed in it, the form being again dressed in his uniform.

Calling some of the better denizens of Advance City together, Wash Waring made them pall bearers, and the crowd adjourned from the saloon to attend, one man remarking:

"Hain't yer goin' ter wait fer ther comin' of ther men from work, landlord, or is yer goin' ter hev two blow-outs?"

"I intend to bury this soldier first and alone, the others later on," was the reply.

"All right, jedge, I'm attendin' both blowouts, fer as I hes got ter go ter my own funeral, I does unto others as I wants ter hev do unto me by goin' to ther last trail," replied Funeral Fred, as they called him from his peculiarity of never missing a burial, and seemed to take a melancholy delight in being on hand.

Away to the grave started the pall bearers, bearing the soldier, and quite a number fell in behind, making it a very respectable procession.

The "I Pass Cemetery" was quite convenient to the town, it receiving too much patronage to allow of its being located far off, and a five minutes' walk brought the procession to a rudely fenced inclosure, where all of the graves looked startlingly new.

In a secluded spot "Edward Covey, Soldier, U. S. A."—for such was freshly painted on his headboard—was consigned to his grave, while Wash Waring, acting as parson now, read the funeral service over him from a well-worn Episcopal Prayer Book, Funeral Fred, having had much experience in that line, throwing in the earth at the solemn words:

"Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

CHAPTER L.

THE BIVOUAC OF THE DEAD.

The "I Pass Cemetery," named by Odds the Sport, and most appropriately it may be said, was very prettily located.

It reversed the usual old style of graveyard, in that it was not built upon a hill, but in a valley, Advance City, the former location of old Fort Advance, occupying the summit of the eminence.

Back to the settlement went the burial party, and it was found that a large crowd had gathered to attend the funeral of the man killed in the saloon and Shadow Tom, shot outside.

There was the poor fellow who had caught the bullet intended for Dart Deering, the gold hunter, and who had been quite popular in the camp.

Then there was Shadow Tom, and in addition the bodies of his two companions, Jake Strong and Slippery Ike.

Tot Dent, the desperado killed by Dart Deering when he was pursuing Idolene Ellwardo, made a fifth body for burial in a group, while the soldier had already been placed in his last resting place.

Truly Death had been rampant in Advance City of late.

There were those in the settlement who would have been much pleased had Quick

Shot Kit and Dave Scully also been killed by Dart Deering instead of having been shot in the hands as had been the case, and, as though the two men had an idea of this kind, neither of these worthies attended the funeral.

Quick Shot Kit had hinted to Dave Scully that he would like to go, as the two sat commiserating each other in the inn, but the latter had quickly replied:

"You kin go if you likes, I won't."
"Why?"

"Wall, I hain't particular anxious to exhibit myself jist now, 'cause I don't want ter remind nobody thet I drewed a gun on Landlord Waring, an' I'd like ter fergit it myself, and besides this do seem a time jist now when our kind is gettin' ther toes tained up, dyin' suddint like with ther boots on, and I kin see thet some of ther men hev got a wish ter hang somebody—fer I seen how I were with Denver when he come in with news from Bufler Bill.

"No, I hain't stuck on goin' ter funerals jist now, Pard Kit, 'cause it comes too near bein' my own layout, and w'd hev been but fer ther fact thet Dart Deerin' was marcful."

"Wall, I don't go nuther, Dave, fer Boss Waring told me I hed some fever an' I'd better stay in."

"Yas, fer ef yer went yer might get a chill."

This settled it, and the two staid at the inn while the large crowd, with the dead, robed in their blankets and carried on stretchers, moved off toward the burial ground, Funeral Fred, with a most sepulchral expression upon his face, following close behind the last body.

The bodies were laid to rest with all the formalities of borderland custom, for the dwellers of the settlement always were glad to show honor to the man who had died with his boots on.

Back from graveland marched the crowd, and night fell upon Advance City ready for anything in the way of excitement.

CHAPTER LI.

THE LANDLORD AND THE PRISONER.

It was the next afternoon when there was only a straggler here and there seen in the streets of Advance City, for all the men who worked were away at their labors, and the idlers were asleep, so as to be fresh for a night's carousal.

Wash Waring left his inn with some food for his prisoner.

Denver had had his dinner, but the landlord wished to have an excuse for visiting him, should he be seen by any idler.

He did not wish to do anything to attract attention to the fact that he had seen fit to visit the prisoner.

Unlocking the two padlocks he hoisted the log door, lowering it again in place by taking the rope inside.

From within he could look in either direction and see any one approaching.

He found the prisoner seated upon a chair looking very disconsolate.

"Denver, I have come to have a talk with you," said Waring.

"Yas, pard, I is glad, fer I feels as though I was in a tomb for sartin."

"The story you told me before the crowd yesterday was not the true one."

"Oh, pard, I—"

"Don't lie, for I have proof of your guilt along with the others, though you told a very plausible story."

"Pard, I—"

"Listen to me."

"Yas."

"That letter I read to the crowd was not all that Buffalo Bill wrote, so I know everything that happened, only I did not wish them to hang you."

"Oh, Lord!"

"If I had read the other evidence I had, nothing could have saved you."

"Thanks."

"I have come now to have a talk with you, and I wish no lying, only the truth, for if you do not deceive me I will pro-

tect you, but if you do I will let the mob take care of you, and you know you deserve no mercy."

"I'll be squar' with you, jedge, indeed I will."

"See that you are, and I know enough to tell when you are trying to deceive me."

"Now, what do you know of Ross Moore?"

The question came without warning, and was so unexpected that it caught Denver wholly off his guard.

It was just what Wash Waring intended, for he saw the prisoner start and show the utmost surprise.

"Pard, what does you know about him?"

"It is just the question I asked you, Denver, and I expect you to answer it."

"Wall, I knows a man by that name."

"I am aware of that."

"I didn't think that you know'd him."

"I do. Where is he now?"

"In this country hunting gold."

"Where?"

"He hev been pretty much all over this west country."

"And now?"

"He's prospectin' somewhar. He war here some weeks ago."

"In Advance City?"

"Yas."

"How long did he stay?"

"Only a very short time, fer he rid in on horseback, went to the Good Luck Saloon, and seen some one thar he wasn't lookin' fer, so got out mighty quick."

"You saw him?"

"Yas, I rid away with him."

"Where did you first know him?"

"I met him at Omaha, whar he were mighty sick, and I tuk care of him."

"Why did he come here?"

"He heard it were a good place fer gold findin'."

"Who was it he saw here he wished to avoid?"

"I dunno, fer he keeps his lips mighty set, tellin' only what he wants, and he don't hev no friends, only him and me was friendly."

"And he left here very quickly."

"He did."

"Is he coming back?"

"I guesses not, fer ther feller he seen give him a scare, I think, and he hain't easy scared."

CHAPTER LII.

GATHERING INFORMATION.

Wash Waring looked the prisoner fixedly in the face.

He seemed to read him thoroughly, and he saw that though he told a part he did not tell all he knew about the man known as Ross Moore.

At last he said: "Do you intend to tell me anything more about this man?"

"I don't know nuthin' more."

"Where is he from?"

"East somewhar."

"You don't know where?"

"I doesn't."

"Do you know why he came west?"

"Some trouble, I guess, drove him like ther rest of us."

"Speak for yourself, Denver, and your fellow cut-throats," sharply said Landlord Waring, and the man flinched under the angry flash in the eyes that were upon him.

"Did Moore know you were here when he came?"

"Wall, yes."

"Then he came here to seek you?"

"He know'd I was over in this country, fer I said I was comin' here."

"When was that?"

"Two years ago."

"And he came here to see you?"

"No, he came gold huntin', fer he hed heard it were good findin' here."

"But from the reason that he saw some one whom he did not expect to or wish to see, he stampeded very quickly?"

"He did, and it's there fust time I ever know'd him ter git from any man."

"Who was the man he feared?"

"Don't know, if I wer goin' ter hang."

"Which will be very likely your doom, for, though I have protected you, I see that you are not acting square with me."

"Oh, pard, don't say it!"

"But I do, for I can read you through and through."

"Has Ross Moore other friends here?"

"Not now."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, he know'd my gang, but you know whar they is."

"Yes, and where you would have been had I not saved you."

"Lordy! You does say sich scary things."

"It is the truth; but do you know if Ross Moore is coming back here?"

"I guess not, for I tells yer he got out in a hurry."

"Suppose I were to set you free, would you go and find him for me, and come back and guide me to him?"

"You bet I would, jedge."

"It would be a dead easy way of savin' my life."

"That is what I wished to know, for it tells me that you can find Ross Moore if you will, and some day I may put you to the test."

Denver could not hide the look of delight that swept over his face, at a chance to escape, but he said nothing, and soon after Wash Waring pulled up the log door, passed out, and lowered it again, doubly locking it.

No one, as far as he knew, had seen his visit to the prisoner.

"Remember what I told you in regard to getting shot from some drunken desperado."

Denver hastened around the projecting wall of the cavern as though he expected the landlord to shoot at him.

"That man knows far more than he will tell."

"I have at least found out that he does know Ross Moore, as Buffalo Bill wrote, and that is much to know."

"So Ross Moore was here, was he, but quickly left, when he saw some one whom he did not expect to find?"

"I'll wager my life against a gold nugget that he saw me, though I did not recognize him then—now I do, as that tall, bearded man I saw come into the Good Luck Saloon and hastily leave it."

"His face puzzled me then, but now I recall that it was Ross Moore."

"But we will meet again—some day!"

When he returned to the inn, Wash Waring found there a fine-looking young man, who served in the capacity of hunter for him.

He kept the inn supplied with game of all kinds and fish, and got good pay, while in his hunting he was also careful to prospect for gold and had often been successful.

"Well, Antelope Ed, what news?" asked Waring when the two were seated in the landlord's private room.

"I brought in a fine lot of game, sir, two horses packed down, and fish, too."

"You never fail to do that; but what of the Don's train?"

"It started all right, sir, and with Dart Deering as guide, but he must have had trouble in going to the camps, for I was watching the wagons pull out and I saw that he carried his left hand in a sling."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir. I followed him, as you told me, and came upon a gang on the lower trail to Last Resort, but when they saw who I was they let me go, and kept dark as to who they were."

"They asked me if I had seen Deering and I told them he had gone to the Don's camp, and it seemed to break them all up, and I heard one say something about his taking the upper trail and fooling them."

"But I went into hiding and saw the train pull out."

"And he wore his hand in a sling?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then he had had trouble, but I thank

you, Ed, and now wish you to be on the alert to report any stranger you may see about."

"I will, sir."

CHAPTER LIII.

A COACH RIDE.

Buffalo Bill rode on his way as soon as he felt assured that Denver's horse would stick faithfully to the trail and take his rider and the horses he was leading straight into Advance City.

He did not hear the cries of the prisoner when he lost his nerve at thought of the death that would await him in the settlement.

The scout was too far away for the voice to reach him, and besides the rattle of the hoofs of his two horses would have prevented it had he been nearer.

The pack animal followed well, keeping close up, so that the scout could devote his whole attention to watchfulness, as he knew that the trail was a dangerous one, not only from road-agents, but also from Indians.

He halted at noon for rest and dinner, stripping his horses of their saddles and bridles as he always did, for he never spared self in looking to the care of a dumb beast.

They were given a good place to feed and cool, running water was at hand.

The scout took only a snack at noon, preferring a substantial meal when he halted in the evening and had the time to cook it.

He was keeping up a very steady and rapid pace for a long ride, but no man knew better what good horseflesh could endure with care and good treatment.

The afternoon went by and sixty miles had been put behind the scout.

He sought and found a good camping place just as darkness fell, looked to his horses first, rubbing them down well, and giving them a long feeding line where grass was plentiful.

Then he built a fire in a snug place, cooked a good supper, enjoyed his pipe after a hearty meal, and by nine o'clock was asleep.

But he was on his way again before daybreak, and made twenty miles ere he halted for breakfast.

This gave the horses an hour of rest, and when his next halt came the scout had added thirty miles more.

"Sixty yesterday and eighty miles to-day," he muttered as at dark he halted for his night camp.

"Not so bad, indeed; but it must be ninety to-morrow and nearly that each day until I reach the fort, and that won't be bad."

Another good supper and six hours' sleep and the scout was again in the saddle and felt that he had made a better ride than the day before.

He made over thirty miles between breakfast and noon, and when he stopped half an hour after dark, he said:

"A cool hundred to-day if a mile."

"You are reeling it off pretty well, pard, but this will be about your hardest day's work."

So the scout continued making from seventy to ninety a day, according to the trail, each day.

The horses were standing it well, for it was an hour and a half halt at breakfast and noon, and a seven hours' rest at night, with good water and grass at each halting place.

This left fourteen hours out of the twenty-four for steady going, and the average was a five-mile-an-hour clip.

The care the scout bestowed on his horses saved them, and in six days he had reached his destination and rode into Fort Resist just as the sunset gun was fired and was greeted with a rousing cheer.

Going straight to headquarters he reported to Colonel Sumner and said:

"I received your letter, sir, and am here to report for duty."

"But I sent it to Advance City."

"I got it there, sir."

"Then you have made a most remark-

able ride, Cody, for it has not been two weeks since I sent it from here, and I hardly expected you for a week yet."

"I lost no time, sir, in obeying orders."

"You never do, but I told Covey, the army courier, to be sure and look you up, as I was not sure of my letter, sent several days before he left, reaching you, for I also wrote to Last Resort and Gold Hill."

"I received the Last Resort letter also, sir, but did not go to Gold Hill, so missed that one."

"As I was on leave, I had just arranged to take a wagon train out to Flagstaff."

"I am sorry you were cuchered out of that, for guiding pays well, and there are few good guides."

"I got a good man in my place, sir."

"I wanted you, Cody, because I am to send out a large fighting force to hit the Indians some hard blows and teach them a lesson, and I wish you to go as scout and guide, and all the officers and men want you also."

"When you get back you shall finish your leave, and have longer time."

"I am ready to start now, sir."

"Not quite so soon, but in a day or two you can go, and be well ahead of the command scouting to pick up what information you can."

"The command will number a thousand men, cavalry, mounted infantry, and a couple of light guns, and will get off in about a week, to be gone a couple of months."

"But it is strange you did not meet Courier Covey; passed him in a night camp doubtless."

"But I did meet him, sir, and I will tell you about it, and regret that I have to report bad news to you about him."

"Great God! Did he not get through then?"

"The dispatches went through all right, sir, for I mailed them in time to catch the stage you intended they should."

"I would have been here sooner only I met Ed Covey on the trail out of Advance City, his horse dead lame."

Then Buffalo Bill told Colonel Sumner the story of the courier's sad fate.

"Well, Cody, you do, indeed, seem to bear a charmed life, and I do not believe it was intended you should be killed, that there is some great future in store for you," said the colonel.

The next afternoon, mounted on a fresh horse, Buffalo Bill started on his long scout, the command following four days later, and to meet him at a given point.

CHAPTER LIV.

IDOLENE FACES HER FOE.

Having seen how matters stood at Advance City and that Buffalo Bill pushed through in a crack ride in his long trail and started out to lead the command upon a fighting expedition to punish the Indians for their red work against the settlements of the pioneers following the onward advance of the army, it will be well to return to the wagon train pushing still further westward in its march of danger to the country about the Grand Canyon of the Colorado.

It will be recalled that Idolene Ellwardo had been waiting for the wagon train to come up with her, and had come upon a scene of rare beauty.

Enrapt with the landscape she had been scanning it with her glass when suddenly her eyes had fallen upon a group of three horsemen, evidently on watch for the train and wishing to keep in concealment themselves.

Having decided, as the guide had not seen them, that she should go on and overtake him again and report their presence, she was about to carry out her intention when suddenly a voice right by her side had startled her.

Many a girl, and brave ones, too, would have grown faint from fear and fallen from her saddle at being thus surprised when she thought herself alone.

The man had ridden noiselessly over

the straw of the pine timber, so had gotten within a few feet of her before he spoke.

There he sat, a coil of lariat in his right hand, and his left resting upon the butt of a revolver, which, however, he did not draw.

He seemed ready to lasso her horse if she sought to fly, or to shoot him if he failed to catch him in the noose, for surely he could not intend to fire on the girl.

One look into the ugly face and Idolene recognized him.

It was a face that was hideous from its reckless deviltry and the stamp of crime upon it.

The man was Red Rob.

It was no wonder that Idolene's heart sunk within her, that her face became very pale.

But her lips did not quiver, her hand had no tremor in it, as she dropped it upon the revolver she carried in her belt, for her rifle hung at her saddle horn.

She controlled herself perfectly, and said in a voice firm and fearless:

"Well, sir, what do you wish with me, for remember, I am not one to trifle with?"

"I knows that ledly, for you is as game as can be found."

"What do you wish?"

"I doesn't mean you no harm, ledly."

"I am watching you, and would shoot you as I would a wolf if you make a move, and the service I would render the country would be balm for my conscience for taking your life."

"Well, yer does think I is mean, and no mistake."

"I know what you are, for I remember day before yesterday."

"Leddy, we didn't mean yer no harm, only I wanted ter talk with yer, ter have yer ask yer pa ter take me along as guide, and them pards of mine was goin' ter give me a reference, yer see."

"But yer run away, and then that feller chipped in and kilt my dear friend Tot, while his bullet clipped my shoulder here, an' all fer nothin'."

"I do not agree with you," and Idolene was anxious now to keep the man in conversation until the train drew near, when she had made up her mind to boldly attempt his capture.

"As for your being guide to our train, though you may be a good plainsman, you are not to be trusted, and your companions whom you wished to give you a character, are about as bad as you are."

"Wall, yer don't consider me an angel and that's a fact."

"But I hain't so bad as I is painted, ledly."

"You could not be worse than what crime has painted indelibly upon your face," and then the idea came to Idolene that the man must know of the near approach of the wagon train also, and as he seemed in no hurry to tell why he was there, that he must have a motive for delay that she could not fathom, so she said quickly and sternly:

"Come, tell me what you wish of me, and quickly, or I will call for help."

"Speak out!"

CHAPTER LV.

A GIRL AT BAY.

Red Rob was considerably surprised at the cool and fearless manner of the young girl whom he had brought to bay.

If she felt fear of him, she certainly did not show it, he thought.

He looked at her with his malignant smile, for she certainly had not hidden the fact that he was a very ugly and repugnant creature.

But she did not flinch under his evil gaze, but met his eye with a firmness and scorn he could not but feel.

"I ask you again what you wish, why you bring me to bay as you do?"

"Speak, sir, for in meeting such as you I am ready to protect myself."

The look he gave her was one of savage ferocity.

For an instant he appeared as though about to use his revolver.

But she did not weaken.
She could not.

"I you do not answer me I shall summon help, for do not think I am unprotected, and then—well, you see yonder tree, and that very convenient limb that stretches out so invitingly to be made a gallows of, for my father is not an over-patient man when such as you are concerned, and the people of the wagon train have no good reason to love you."

She saw his face grow sickly in hue when she hinted at the tree being made a gallows, and her nerve came back to her and she really felt a match for the desperado.

"I has a question ter ask you," he said quickly, as he no longer cared to linger when the girl hinted at his being hanged if found there.

"What is it?"

"Who is yer train guide?"

"What is that your affair?"

"A heap, 'cause I wants ter know."

"He is a man that you are very much afraid of."

"I is afeerd of no man."

"Then why did you not halt and have a talk with him the other day when there were four to one against him?"

"Then ther guide is Dart Deering?"

"Yes."

"I don't believe yer, gal."

"As I do not like to have my word doubted, even by you, just wait until he comes up, and see if I am not right."

"Lord, no! I don't want ter be seen here!"

"But yer means it thet Dart Deering is ther guide of yer train?"

"I do."

"Has he got any pards along?"

"The train people."

"I means any he fetched with him."

"No."

"Sartin?"

"I have seen none."

"Now tell me ef he be wounded?"

"Yes, in the left hand, slightly, he says."

"As you seem aware of the fact, you were the one who doubtless fired on him from amush last night."

"I wasn't nuther."

"How did you come to ask me if he was wounded?"

"I wanted ter know if he was."

"Then you know that he was to be ambushed, and wished to know if the plot was carried out?"

"No, I didn't; but ther reason I wanted ter know I won't tell, only I came here ter git a close look at ther train as it went by and see fer myself what I wanted."

"Then I seen you, and so thought I'd find out."

"Well, I have told you."

"And it seems you have companions watching the train?"

"What does yer mean, ledly?"

"Nothing, only that we know of your plots and are prepared for them—see? Isn't that some one coming through the timber there?"

He turned his head to look, and instantly her hand dropped from the revolver butt to her rifle, the weapon was slung around and covered him with a quickness worthy an old plainsman, and her voice rang as she cried:

"Now, up with your hands or I will kill you without mercy!"

He was fairly caught, for he had returned his revolver to his belt, as though to reassure her, and his lasso now hung over his saddle horn.

He had turned in his saddle to look back down the trail at her words, and with a start of fear at the thought of his danger if there was any one close upon him.

While he was looking earnestly through the pines her startling words fell upon his ears.

CHAPTER LVI.

IDOLENE'S CAPTIVE.

Idolene Ellwardo was a surprise to herself, in the bold deed she had done.

Like a flash it had come upon her that Red Rob was surely on the track of the train, that the men she saw across the valley belonged to his party.

The man smiled a sickly smile as he looked around at her and was very uneasy as he said:

"Yer plays it well ter skeer me, ledly, but—"

"Up with your hands or I'll send a bullet through your heart!"

There was no mistaking this.

Red Rob was sliding his hand toward his belt, while to gain time he asked:

"Does yer mean it, Miss?"

"I'll give you five seconds to obey me—then I pull trigger if your hands are not up."

He saw that her rifle was cocked, that one finger was pressing the trigger lightly, and a touch would send the bullet into his body.

He dared not hesitate when he looked into her eyes, so up went his hands above his head.

"Does that please yer?" he growled.

"Not yet."

Still keeping him covered, she with one hand took the lariat swung on her saddle horn, cast the noose skillfully over his upraised hands, drew it taut, and then dragged his hands downward thus held together and with a few quick turns had him secure.

"This pleases me," she said as she made his hands fast to his saddle horn, and leaning forward drew from his belt his knife and revolvers.

"This, too," she added, as she removed his rifle from the cantle of his saddle.

"You is ther pluckiest gal I ever seen," said Red Rob with admiration of her in spite of his being the victim of her daring and clever act.

"Thanks. Now come with me."

"Whar?"

"Ahead on the trail."

"Who is thar?"

"An acquaintance of yours."

"I don't want ter see him."

"But he does wish to see you."

"Who is he?"

"Dart Deering, the guide."

"Oh, Lord!"

The man could not resist her, for his hands were secure, and had he been able to free them he was unarmed.

So she led his horse along by the side of her own, and soon urged both animals into a gallop.

If the men across the valley were watching now she did not wish them to notice that the man was a prisoner.

Her first impulse had been to await the coming up of the train and surrender her prisoner to her father.

But her next was to take him ahead to the guide and let him decide what to do with him, for he claimed to have come to ask only about Dart Deering.

A rapid ride along the valley trail of two miles brought her up with the guide.

He heard the strokes of the horses' hoofs, turned in his saddle, and drew to a quick halt.

The guide's face wore a look of amazement as Idolene and her prisoner dashed up and drew rein, while the girl said coolly:

"I have brought you a prisoner, Guide Deering."

CHAPTER LVII.

THE STORY TOLD.

When the guide turned in amazement to the fair girl and her brutal-looking prisoner, his face showed that he beheld that which he had believed an impossibility—Red Rob captured by a woman.

"Well, Miss Ellwardo, I am astonished, indeed."

"What does it mean?" he asked and he glanced from her to her prisoner.

"Do you recognize him, sir?"

"Oh, yes, as Red Rob, a man of law-

less proclivities, which will some day entangle a rope about his neck."

"That is my opinion also, but do you not think I am revenged for his attempt to capture me day before yesterday?"

"Ah, yes, fully revenged."

"Did he dare go to the train after being aware that you must have recognized him and the people made him prisoner?"

"No, he did not go to the train, and I think he would get into trouble if he did."

"Then your father captured him and sent him on to me?"

"The Don certainly has much confidence in you, Miss Ellwardo."

"My father did not capture him."

"Who did then?"

"I did."

"But when and how?"

"Back on the trail a couple of miles, when he came upon me suddenly, and having me at a disadvantage questioned me as to your being the guide of the train, and whether you were wounded or not."

"I got the opportunity to turn the tables upon him, and my rifle made me mistress of the situation, so I tied him, as you see, and brought him on to place him in your charge, or rather ask you what should I do with him."

"Miss Ellwardo, you possess a most remarkable nerve and have accomplished wonders in what you have done."

"I will relieve you of your prisoner and at once, for I assure you it is not right to let you carry the man back to the train, as there are doubtless accomplices near who would rescue him at all hazards."

"You are right, for he has companions, as I saw three of them across the valley and who appear to have escaped your eye."

"They did, indeed."

"I shall have to ask your assistance as guide if I do not do better, Miss Ellwardo."

"I expected we would meet outlaws upon the trail, yet hardly so soon after starting as this."

"Shall I relieve you of your prisoner, Miss Ellwardo, for I will have him with me when the train comes up for the noon camp, and I may learn something from a talk with the fellow?"

"He is in your keeping, sir, and I am not sorry to get rid of him."

"Now I will ride back and meet the train."

With this Idolene bowed and the guide raised his hat, the prisoner as silent as when forced to join the guide.

Back on the trail rode Idolene, and in a short while she came to where she could get a view a mile or more along the valley.

To her delight she saw the train just coming into sight.

Then she halted and turned her glass upon the spot where she had seen the three men across the valley.

They were gone.

She recognized the spot where she had seen them standing in a group.

But they were not there.

"I wonder if they saw me capture that Red Rob—no, for had they done so they would have rescued him from me."

"They may attempt it from the guide if they ride on ahead and discover that Red Rob is a prisoner."

"There, father sees me and is riding to meet me."

"I will also meet him."

In five minutes more she had met her father, who was several hundred yards ahead of the train, and with pardonable pride in her achievement she made known her adventure and how she had captured Red Rob and delivered him to the guide.

"My brave girl! You are, indeed, a heroine, and when we camp at noon all shall hear of your daring deed and see your prisoner, whom alone you captured."

"I am proud of you."

CHAPTER LVIII.

IDOLENE HEARS BAD NEWS.

The Don could not but feel proud of his beautiful and brave daughter and both complimented and congratulated her upon her pluck and escape.

He argued that if Red Rob really meant no harm his previous actions were no proof of it.

He had clung to the train on the march in spite of all rebuffs, having joined it one day on the way in a mysterious manner, for he had come into a night camp and asked for shelter.

His appearance was against him decidedly, but he told of ill fortune that had befallen him, and for years he had been a wanderer about the mines until he knew every trail perfectly, and offered to guide the train simply from friendship.

The Don had arranged with him to take them as far as Last Resort, and this he did, showing that he knew the country well.

But no one seemed to care for him, and when he got to Last Resort the Don had letters which secured the services of Buffalo Bill, and through him later as has been seen Dart Deering as guide.

The Don promptly paid Red Rob a month's wages and allowed him to go, treating him generously in other ways.

All were glad to see him go, for they had seen that he was well known about Last Resort, and by a rather hard class of people.

Unable to be taken along with the train in any capacity, Red Rob's next appearance was when he attempted to capture Idolene.

Now he again turned up miles on the trail from Last Resort, and asked if Dart Deering was the guide, and if he was wounded.

This in face of the fact that Deering had been fired on, on his way to the train, and had been wounded, certainly told against Red Rob.

Coming to Idolene, too, looked badly, as well as that she had just discovered across the valley other apparent watchers of the wagon train.

If they were honest men they would not be in hiding, and the report about that the Don carried much valuable jewelry and gold, and the country being full of lawless characters, it was natural to suspect Red Rob of being among those who intended robbing the westward-bound party as soon as opportunity offered.

Such thoughts came into the mind of Don Ellwardo as he heard Idolene's story, and he began to grow very bitter toward Red Rob.

"I believe if we hanged that fellow, my child, it would show the rest of his gang that we are in earnest, and make them let us alone."

"But, father, would you hang him for what he has done?"

"Men have been justly hanged for doing far less."

"Whatever his motive, he came very near costing you your life by your own hand, and now, after being discharged from the train, and knowing that we have a guide, he is following us, and has companions with him beyond a doubt."

"Yes, I believe it would be best for the train people to try him at our night camp, and I am sure that the verdict will be to hang him."

"Father, I am sorry that I captured him, for I would so dislike to have him hanged, feeling that it was through me that he so went out of life."

"Leave it for the Guide to decide, father."

"As you ask it, my child, I yield."

"But should Deering decide that the man should be hanged, what then?"

"I will yield, sir, for I believe Mr. Deering will know best what to do in the matter."

"You must remember, Idolene, that this man did try to capture you, for some purpose, that one of his companions lost his life and he was slightly wounded in the attempt."

"Yes, sir."

"Then he and his band did fire upon Mr. Deering for protecting you, and the Guide was again fired on in coming to our camp, a fact that the prisoner knows."

"True, sir."

"There are others shadowing us also, of his gang beyond a doubt, and then he did come upon you secretly, with revolver in one hand, lasso in the other, as you tell me, ready to catch you, or fire on you if you attempted escape."

"He did, father."

"That you turned the tables upon him is to your credit, and I cannot but feel that you saved yourself by it."

"Now I am leader of our party, and I have a great responsibility upon me, lives to protect, property to care for, and it causes me to feel that I must act with firmness and courage, and I do believe that the hanging of this desperado will save us a world of trouble."

"I am willing for Guide Deering to decide, father."

"Then let us go on and have a talk with him before the train halts for noon, for he will go into camp soon now."

They rode on at a gallop, as the train was now close up, and after a ride of some two miles came to a clump of timber surrounded by a meadow, and where there was a stream.

There the Guide had halted for the noon rest and meal, as wood, water, and grass were plentiful right at hand.

They saw Deering standing by his horse and awaiting their coming.

But the prisoner was not visible.

"Where is your prisoner, Idolene?"

"I suppose in the timber, sir."

As they came near Dart Deering called out:

"I am sorry to report bad news, Miss Ellwardo. Your prisoner has escaped from me."

CHAPTER LIX.

THE GUIDE TELLS HOW IT HAPPENED.

The Don and Idolene reined up quickly at the startling report of the guide.

They sat on their horses looking fixedly at the guide, and neither of them made reply.

Dart Deering stood by his horse, from whose back he had just taken the saddle, and was holding his stake-rope in his hand.

The horse was panting, as though from a recent hard run, and he was wet with sweat.

"I am sorry, Miss Ellwardo, in fact humiliated, to make such a report to you, but it is true, your prisoner has escaped from me," said the guide.

"Escaped?" at last said Idolene, though at heart she was really glad, as she had feared the guide would decide that Red Rob should be hanged.

"Escaped?" repeated the Don.

"It is true."

"Escaped, and from you?" and the guide thought that he detected some sign of scorn in the girl's tone and look, for his face flushed.

But he replied:

"Yes, Miss Ellwardo, he escaped from me."

"It is too bad."

"It certainly is, Don Ellwardo."

"We shall hear from him again, I fear."

"I hope not, sir, as I have reason to believe that I wounded him."

"May I ask how it happened, Mr. Deering?"

"I will tell you, Miss Ellwardo, for I wish to exonerate myself, if I can, in your eyes."

"Likely it is not necessary, Mr. Deering, for if he escaped from you, I am sure that it could not have been prevented by any one," said the Don.

"But I am interested, father, in knowing how he could escape from Mr. Deering," replied Idolene, and again the guide looked sharply at her to detect if she was speaking with sarcasm.

"Yes, how was it, Guide Deering?"

"After Miss Ellwardo turned her prisoner over to my keeping, I had securely bound him to his saddle, and then allowed his horse to follow mine."

"Yes."

"As the animal followed willingly, I did not lead him as I should have done."

"We got to yonder bluff, and the trail winds around it, while you will find a pass leading off to a valley beyond."

"It was right there that I was particularly observing the danger of the trails, for the wagons, passing under the bluff in a narrow road, and with a cliff a hundred feet high to keep an eye on, when the prisoner must have dusted, for when I looked back for him he was not in sight."

"His horse must have been well trained for him to stop him, bound as he was, without attracting my attention, then wheel him and ride into the pass I referred to."

"I had lost sight of him for a minute, I am sure, and finding him not close up to me, I turned and rode back at a run."

"The pass was not two hundred yards back, and coming to it I halted."

"He had gone that way?"

"I was not sure, sir, for the rocky ground was too hard to leave a trail, and so I rode back in the direction to where there was some soft earth."

"No trail was there, so I then knew he had turned into the pass."

"Back I went, and dashing into the pass I held on at full speed."

"But I had lost a number of valuable minutes, so I felt that he had the advantage, and as Miss Ellwardo will doubtless remember, her prisoner was splendidly mounted."

"He certainly was, sir."

"I got through the pass to behold the prisoner, having crossed the stream, riding like the wind across the plain beyond."

"I crossed also, and gave my horse a test of speed with the animal ridden by the prisoner; but finding that I was not gaining, I halted and emptied my repeating rifle at him, though the distance was hardly more than within range."

"And you hit him?"

"I saw him reel in his saddle, sir, and watching him, he appeared to me to ride as though wounded."

"But you gave up the chase?"

"I was forced to do it, sir, for I dared not go far from the trail, and I had just returned when you came up, for here is where we halt for our noon rest."

CHAPTER LX.

THE NOON-DAY HALT.

When he had finished telling his story, the guide looked at Idolene, as though to see if she exonerated him, and his face wore an anxious expression that told he wished to know.

The Don quietly said:

"Well, Mr. Deering, I do not see how you could have done other than you did, so let him go."

Still Idolene did not speak, and so Dart Deering asked:

"And is Miss Ellwardo's verdict for or against me?"

Thus appealed to, Idolene said:

"Why, of course, it is not against you, for, from all we know of Mr. Deering, if a prisoner could escape from him, it would be useless for anyone else to attempt to hold him."

The guide did not like the answer, and his face showed it, for there was still the belief in his mind that Idolene was speaking with sarcasm, from some reason.

She certainly did not speak to him in the frank manner she had when they first had met.

But the Don did not notice Idolene's remark as the guide did, and said:

"Of course, my dear, I am sure it would be useless for others to attempt to hold a prisoner if Mr. Deering could not."

Perhaps observing how the guide had taken her reply, Idolene said:

"But, Mr. Deering, if you believe that the prisoner is wounded, is it not my duty to find and care for him, for even he should not be allowed to go, bound as he is, and perhaps suffering and in danger of dying a terrible death?"

"As for that, Miss Ellwardo, the man has companions about, and he will find them, while if he does not, his horse will take him back to Last Resort, where he will be cared for and tell what story he wishes of his being in that condition."

"But, meanwhile, I deem it our duty to find him, as he may bleed to death, bound as he is."

The Don looked at the guide, who responded:

"I will go on his trail at once."

"You know the trail ahead, Don Ellwardo, as it is well marked as far as the night camp, where I will join you."

"It is in a piece of timber in a meadow bordering a stream, and about which rises a high cliff."

"Will you go alone?" asked Idolene.

"Oh, yes, Miss Ellwardo."

"But the train will soon be up, and some of the men will accompany you, while you must have dinner before you go."

"Oh, no, I prefer to go alone, Miss Ellwardo, and I always go prepared for a meal, as I carry a couple of days' provisions with me."

"I will go at once," and saddling his horse he rode away, just as the train came in sight.

"Father, had we better speak of this affair to the people?" asked Idolene, as the guide rode away, and the Don saw that her face was very serious.

"Do you mean the escape of the prisoner, my dear?"

"I mean my capture of him and then his escape from the guide."

"Why, what reason is there for not speaking of it, Idolene?"

"Only, sir, that it might make some of the people have less confidence in the guide, where they now have every faith in him."

"Nonsense, my child, for Deering's allowing the prisoner to escape is not to his discredit, surely; but I can see that a few might think he was neglectful, and hence might be so in more important matters."

"It will be very important to all of us, if that man Red Rob turns up again, with revenge in his heart for his capture, as well as a desire to rob; but you know best, father, and I will only say that I hoped he escaped being wounded, for, bad as he is, I cannot bear to think of him as suffering, and bound to his saddle, wandering where his horse may choose to go, perhaps with a dying rider upon him."

"You are sunshine and tears, iron nerve and tender heart all in one."

"But here come our people, and now to tell them of my fair heroine."

The train had now come up, the Don placed the wagons in circle, the fires were built, cooks went to work, horses turned out, and all went as though a military camp.

Idolene's adventure was told, and she did indeed become a heroine, while her brother, Mora, and Harry Hartley came up from being the rear guard and again heard the tale of what the brave girl had done.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE FAIR TRAILER.

Idolene watched the people carefully to note the effect upon them of the escape of the prisoner.

Her capture of him was reviewed with great enthusiasm, but, just as she had feared, it caused a few to feel less confidence in the guide.

If he could not hold a desperado, whom a young girl had made prisoner, there was reason, some thought, for fearing that he was less to be relied upon than they had been led to believe.

This feeling Idolene saw was shared by not a few.

After camping an hour and a half the Don gave the order to pull out.

He went himself to the head of the train, and some little distance in advance, while Idolene dropped back in the rear and said:

"Mora, I will go with you and Harry, as an extra guard in the rear."

The two boys were delighted to have her with them, and the last wagon pulled out leaving them in the camp.

"I will wait for you at a pass ahead, Mora," said Idolene, as the boys lay in ambush in the camp, their horses having been hitched ahead in the trail, to notice if anyone was following the train and came into sight.

After a wait of half an hour they mounted their horses and followed.

Reaching the pass they found Idolene awaiting them.

"Harry, do you mind keeping guard alone for a while, as I wish Mora with me, for I am going to make a detour of a few miles and strike the trail on ahead?"

"No, indeed, Miss Idolene, only I wish you'd have elected me instead of Mora to go with you," was the boy's gallant response.

Off together then rode the brother and sister, and a ride of half a mile brought them out of the pass into a little valley.

Here was a stream, not very deep, and they readily forded it.

Just there were three trails of shod horses.

The tracks showed that two trails crossed the stream, out upon the plain, and one track returned and re-entered the pass.

"Here is where the guide followed the prisoner, Mora, for these trails are very distinct."

"And here is the track of the guide's horse returning."

"Yes, sister."

"Now we'll see where the guide turned back."

They found the spot, for the ground was yielding, and it was out upon the plain.

There were the boot heels of a man there, too, the guide's track where he had dismounted to fire at the escaping desperado.

"Now brother, look out for any red stains on the ground, after we go along some distance to see if the man was wounded."

They searched carefully for a couple of miles, but found no red stains on the ground, only the trail of the escaping prisoner's horse.

Suddenly this turned short off to the left, and bent around as though going back to the trail the wagon was following.

A few miles further on, still following the trail of Red Rob's horse, for all along the ground was soft and an iron shod hoof readily left a deep track, they came to where the tracks showed a halt.

"Mora?"

"Yes, sister."

"The guide said that he was going to follow on Red Rob's trail, to see if he was wounded."

"Yes."

"Well, he did not do it."

"No."

"His trail kept right on at the pass, and did not turn off in this direction as we have."

"That is so, sister."

"Now, I do not wish to think Mr. Deering is not capable, for I believe that he is thoroughly so; but his heart does not appear to be in his work. There is something in his mind, or he would not have let that man escape."

"Then too, he did not keep his promise to me, to follow the man's trail and see if he was wounded and needed aid."

"He certainly did not."

"He came straight on the trail, doubtless thinking we would not notice the fact, and that shows that he will bear watching, and we must take no chances

on this trail—oh! see here! Here is the track of a horse coming from the direction we are going, and it means this trail of Red Rob's."

"Now, what does this mean?"

"I don't know," was Mora's frank reply.

CHAPTER LXII.

BACK TO THE TRAIL.

Idolene saw that the tracks of the horse that came out to meet Red Rob turned back, and the two went together for half a mile.

Then they led to where there was another trail, and of five horses coming in from another direction.

Here there had been a halt for some little time, it seemed, of the seven horses, the two ridden by Red Rob and the one who had come to meet him.

From there one track returned over the trail it had come, while all the rest went off to the right.

"Well, Mora we don't care to follow that bunch of tracks, and it is lucky we did not get here sooner."

"That is so, sister, but we can follow this one."

"Oh, yes, for it leads in the direction we have to go to get back to the trail."

"Yes, and the wagon trail cannot be very far away."

"Not very."

"But of one thing I am certain."

"And that is—"

"That if Red Rob was wounded, he has found friends to care for him."

"So he has, and my mind is relieved."

"You've got a mighty tender heart, sis, in spite of your being brave enough to tackle a buzz saw."

"But let us push on, for I am anxious to be nearer the train when you are alone."

So on they rode once more, following the trail back to where they expected to meet the wagons.

They saw that the tracks of the horse returned over the trail he had gone on, and following it they came, after a while, to a hill upon which they halted.

Below them at the base of the hill they saw the trail they sought.

The tracks they had followed led from it and back to it again.

Going down the hill they reached the trail to discover that the wagons had gone by.

"They cannot be very far ahead, Mora."

"No, sis, we will soon overtake them."

"But the trail we followed is lost here for the train passing has destroyed it."

"Yes, and Harry must have passed too."

"I had forgotten about him, and guess he has; but if he has not, then he is a plucky fellow to stay this far in the rear and alive."

Looking back down the wagon trail they beheld the young guard coming slowly along.

"Ho, Mora, I'm glad to see you, for I've got a report to make," he called out.

"What is it, Harry?"

"Back in the trail I saw far off from the trail five horsemen, and they have evidently been watching the train pass."

"I kept back in the timber, so that they did not see me, and after they had remained watching awhile they turned and rode back from the trail."

"Then I came on to go ahead and report, as I thought it best to do so, not being sure where you and Miss Idolene were."

"We have been on a long ride, Harry, but Mora will remain with you now, for I will report to father what you have seen, and both of you had best be constantly on the alert, for there is certainly danger on all sides of us," and with a wave of her hand Idolene rode rapidly to overtake the wagon train, leaving the two boy guards to protect the rear as before.

CHAPTER LXIII.

GATHERING FEARS.

Idolene soon overtook the train, and as she appeared a shout greeted her, while Mr. Hartley called out:

"We were just about to call a halt, Miss Idolene, and go on the search after you, for we thought you were ahead with your father, until we came to a long view ahead and saw that he was alone."

"Then we were sure you could not be ahead of him, and all became most anxious."

"I am sorry to have caused you any anxiety, Mr. Hartley, for I have been back with the boys, and they are fine guards, I assure you, and I have to report to you that small bands of horsemen have been seen on each side of this trail, evidently shadowing us."

"That is bad. Were they Indians?"

"No sir, white men."

"Then we must travel in closer order and keep every eye open."

"I did not expect trouble for a day or two yet," said Hunt Hartley seriously.

"I hope it will not come at all, but we must be on the watch for it, Mr. Hartley, as I am sure that danger is in the air."

"I fear it indeed."

"Now I will ride on and allay mother's fears about me, and then join father ahead."

"Don't venture too much, Miss Idolene."

"No fear of me," and riding on Idolene was soon by her mother's ambulance, and quieted her anxiety about her, promising not to risk too much.

Then she rode on and joined her father, who was half a mile ahead of the train. He greeted her cheerily as she rode up, and said:

"I have seen nothing of our guide, and we are all of a dozen miles from our noon camp."

"Yes, sir, but there seems to be the fresh trail of a horse," and Idolene pointed to iron-shod tracks.

CHAPTER LXIV.

UNDER DARK SUSPICION.

There were fresh tracks on the trail, and of a single horseman, as Idolene had said.

And strange to say, the Don had not before taken notice of them.

"You are right, Idolene, and your eyes detected the fresh trail at once, but are they keen enough to say whether they were made by the guide's horse or not, though of course, they must be and he have come back into their trail and now be at his post ahead."

Idolene had been keeping her eyes upon the tracks, as she rode along, and replied:

"There are the hoofmarks of our guide's horse, father."

"Then he evidently did not find the prisoner."

"Father, he did not leave the trail to look for them."

"Why was that, my child?"

"He had his own reasons, sir, and when we overtake him I will ask him."

"You surprise me, for he certainly said he would go."

"And he as certainly did not go, sir."

"How do you know this, Idolene?"

"For I went myself, sir."

"You?"

"And Mora."

"Yes sir."

"How was this?"

"Well, father, I am keeping a weather eye open on this trail, as the trailers say, for breakers ahead."

"I realize as well as you do our great danger, and I am capable of aiding you if I am but a girl?"

"Indeed you are, and have aided me greatly."

"You are worth a dozen men any day."

"Thank you, sir."

"But tell me what you did?"

"I stopped back with the boys when the train pulled out of camp."

"With Mora?"

"Yes, and Harry."

"I see."

"And I borrowed Mora, leaving Harry Hartley to do guard duty."

"Well?"

"Mora and I took the pass that Red Rob had, followed his trail across the stream, saw where the guide had turned back, and then pushing on made a flank movement, still following Red Rob's trail, until we came upon a place where he had been joined by another horseman."

"Here, too, we saw the tracks of half a dozen horses, and they branched off, Red Rob's horse with them."

"But the tracks of the one horse we had seen come out and meet Red Rob turned back toward our trail."

"Wonderful is it how you could do this, my child?"

"Oh, Mora is as good as a young Indian on a trail, and I kept my eyes open, too."

"And then?"

"We reached the trail to find that the wagon train had passed, and the tracks of the horse we had followed were obliterated by the others."

"You have done what few men could do, my child."

"Mora was with me, sir."

"And then?"

"Harry Hartley just then came along, for he had kept his post bravely in the rear, though alone, and he reported having seen five men on the right of the trail watching the train, though they did not see him."

"A brave boy, that."

"Indeed, he is, sir."

"Then you came on to report to me, Idolene?"

"Yes, sir."

"And your brother?"

"Is back in the rear with Harry, sir."

"Good."

"But did you tell Mr. Hartley or any of the train people?"

"I only told that small bands of white men had been seen watching the train from each side of the trail."

"That Mora and I had gone trailing I did not tell."

"And you have formed an opinion I feel."

"Yes, sir."

"And it is?"

"That the guide is not as watchful as he should be, hence not to be so fully trusted as we at first thought."

"You are severe on him, my child."

"I think not, father."

"He saved your life, you must not forget, and is as brave—"

"I do not question his bravery, father, nor do I forget the life debt I owe him."

"But he certainly did not see men I saw watching us this morning, he allowed my prisoner to escape, and when he promised me that he would go after Red Rob to see if he was wounded, he failed to do so, and therefore did not keep his word."

"He is therefore negligent and not to be wholly trusted."

"You make a strong case against him, Idolene, and I should think from an unprejudiced standpoint."

"I have no desire to condemn the man to whom I owe so much without what I deem just reason, father."

"I should not think so, my dear."

"And I have further reason, sir."

"Tell me all, Idolene."

"I recognize the tracks of this fresh trail we are looking at."

"Indeed?"

"It is made by the horse of our guide."

"Ah! How do you know that?"

"Do you observe that the hoofs are small and shapely?"

"Yes."

"Well, I have studied that track, and it is the same one that went out from this trail to where it met Red Rob, and—"

"My God! This would imply—"

"I imply nothing, only the guide must explain, or answer?" was the girl's stern rejoinder.

CHAPTER LXV.

AGAINST THE EVIDENCE.

The Don read just what was in his daughter's thoughts, that in spite of Dart Deering being recommended by Buffalo Bill, in spite of his courtly manners and gentlemanly exterior, that he might be after all tempted to do what others longed to do, rob the wagon train.

The belief that the Don carried a large amount of gold and valuable jewelry with him might have been too great temptation and he might have intended to yield to it.

"I understand how you fear that the guide may become a traitor, my child, and I admit that circumstances turn upon him a dark suspicion."

"I know that out in this wild land it is hard to tell who to trust."

"That the best of men have gone to the bad from too great temptation, and many have wrecked their lives."

"You dread that it may be so with Dart Deering."

"I sincerely trust we may be wrong, and yet it is my duty to have him explain."

"We will hear what he has to say."

"We know what we know, and we will see if he tries to deceive us."

With this they urged their horses on at a more rapid pace.

A few minutes passed and then a bend in the trail revealed the guide.

He had heard the hoof falls of their horses, and halting had turned about, his rifle ready for use, as though not knowing who he had to meet.

Recognizing them he waved his sombrero and rode on again, leaving them to overtake him.

This they soon did, and he remarked pleasantly:

"I am glad to have company again."

"I felt anxious about that escaped desperado, Mr. Deering, as you thought he was wounded, and asked my father to come on and see if you had made any discovery regarding him?"

"I have, Miss Ellwardo."

"Indeed!"

"Then you went on his trail as you said?"

"No, I did not, and I'll tell you why."

"When I reached the pass where he turned off, I saw several men watching the trail from a distance, so I held straight on, for I felt if they knew this country and saw me turn off that they were well aware the wagons could not go that way."

"Yes, very true," said the Don.

"I deemed it best to let Red Rob die than let the train get into trouble, and I kept straight on."

"So you do not know what his fate has been?" asked Idolene.

"On the contrary, Miss Ellwardo, I do know that he is very much alive, for a few miles back I heard a shot."

"I left the trail to try and discover the cause and came in sight after a mile's ride of no less a person than Red Rob, riding leisurely along and safe and sound apparently."

"I at once determined upon his capture or to kill him if I could not take him alive, for he had not seen me, when I heard voices in another direction."

"I had just time to spur into a water wash near me where my horse and self were hidden."

"Soon several horsemen came along not far from my hiding place; they saw Red Rob and hailed him, and halting they all had a conversation, but what it was I was not near enough to hear."

"After a few minutes they rode off together, and coming out of my hiding place I went to where they were and counted the tracks of their horses."

"Then I took my own trail back to this one, and soon after made a discovery that men were hovering upon our left flank, too."

"This determined me to ride on and await the coming up of the wagons at a point ahead several miles where there is an old deserted fort, and where we can halt for the night and find water, wood,

and grass right at hand, if we have to stand a siege, in which case I could ride back to Last Resort and Advance City and summon help that would soon come and clean out any band of cutthroats that might attempt to hold up the train."

The Don looked at Idolene with a smile that showed he was glad to feel she was mistaken.

The guide had told his story in an easy way, with no apparent thought that he was under a dark cloud of suspicion.

Idolene understood her father's look and returned it with an expression that read:

"I was wrong in spite of appearances against him—he has fully exonerated himself."

CHAPTER LXVI.

CAPTURED.

The three, the Don, Idolene, and the guide, rode on more rapidly to reach the old fort, which Dart Deering had spoken of.

They found it in a bend of a large and deep stream and commanding several hundred acres of good meadow land.

The cabins were yet in fairly good repair, the stockade wall across the point of land was yet firm and commanded the approach to the little peninsula.

There was a great quantity of fire wood left by the soldiers, and the barrier of the stockade being still up, the grass had not been fed upon by wild animals, so was plentiful for the stock of the train.

"This is the very place for us, indeed," said the Don, and he added:

"Yes, this old fort is down on my map as one I was to visit, and as it is a fine country to settle in, we will stop here, for we can find no better, and the people will no doubt agree with me when we hold a consultation."

The guide looked surprised and said: "But I thought your destination was Flagstaff, sir?"

"True, it was; but if we find all that we want so much nearer to civilization, such as it is, we will remain, for it would be foolish to go further."

"Then I can make an expedition with the men to Flagstaff when we get well settled, as my duty calls me there also."

"No, Mr. Deering, this is our halting place, for the soil is all that we could wish and houses are all ready for us, and we can make a garden spot of this peninsula in time."

"We could defend it against ten times our number; the river forms a natural barrier, and the stockade can protect us with a few good rifles behind it."

"There is plenty of arable land for the needs of all of us for the present, and any quantity more close at hand when needed."

"Yes, here we rest, as the Indians said when they reached the beautiful country of Alabama."

"It is a beautiful spot, father, and a safe one," and, like the Don, Idolene was most enthusiastic over their intended home.

But the guide looked disappointed. He had doubtless anticipated a long overland trip in the company of pleasant people, Idolene being the greatest attraction, and if they halted there then that hope would end.

His occupation would be gone at once. Idolene saw his expression, and doubtless read it, for she said in a low tone to her father:

"You had better explain to Mr. Deering that you will need his aid for the time of your contract with him as guide."

"Ah, yes, but do not think our halting here—in Alabama Vale we will call it—will allow you to escape us, Mr. Deering, for my contract holds you until we are settled comfortably in our new home, and that will not mean for several months yet."

"You will have to become scout now, our guard, and hunter, so kindly remember that you are one still under pay, and we very much need your services."

The guide's face brightened and he replied:

"I thank you, Don Ellwardo, and I shall endeavor to do my duty."

"We feel that, Deering."

"And now, sir, I will ride back and hurry on the train."

"No, my daughter will go, for I will need you in locating the homes for the people and to help me get all arranged for their coming."

"Certainly, sir, but do you think it best for Miss Ellwardo to go alone, as the train is fully four miles back?"

"I'll risk it, Mr. Deering, for my horse is not lame now, and can outfoot any animal he may have to fly from, while I am armed you know," and with a bound Idolene sprang into her saddle and with a wave of her hand was off.

The train was all of four miles back, but Hunt Hartley hurried them on when he heard the good news that a home had been found much nearer than Flagstaff.

And such a home, too, with cabins all ready for them, and a fort in which to defend themselves.

"Yes, I knew that your father had three places on the maps that were to be his guide, and this fort was one, only it was not certain that it had been abandoned by the Government, and we deemed it off our trail, and much further from Last Resort, for this cannot be over thirty-five miles."

"Just that distance, Mr. Hartley, the guide said, and it is off the trail a couple of miles, but Mr. Deering hastened us there as he feared trouble, and did not wish to camp where he had intended to," replied Idolene.

"Well, we are in luck, that is certain, for your father knows just what kind of a place is wanted for us, and our home it will be if it is abandoned."

"It is, for on a board at the barrier is painted, as I read it:

"Fort Bend—Abandoned."

"Then follows the date it was built and abandoned, and name of general commanding, which I forget."

"That settles it, Miss Idolene—come all, push ahead hard for Alabama Vale, our new home," and a cheer greeted the words of Hunt Hartley.

As the wagon train was to halt there, the cattle were not spared, having a long rest before them, and the sun was yet an hour high when they pulled into the bend, cheering as they did so.

The guide was there to meet them, but the Don had ridden off after a herd of deer, he said, and had not returned.

But the guide sent the people to their respective places, and when darkness fell all was a cheery scene in the old fort in the little valley.

But a cloud had already fallen upon the settlers, for Mora and Harry had come in just at dark, and reported seeing in the distance a party of horsemen dashing along, in their lead being no less a personage than Red Rob, while in the midst of those following they had recognized Don Ellwardo.

He was a prisoner, for his hands had been bound behind his back, and one of the men was leading his horse.

They did not see the two boys, who had just rashly thought of dashing out to the rescue, but knowing that they dare not fire on the band for fear of killing the Don, yet would be fired upon themselves, they merely determined to dash on after the train and give the alarm.

This they did, arriving at nightfall, but Dart Deering at once mounted his horse and started off to get what tidings he could when Mora told him where the outlaws had been seen.

CHAPTER LXVII.

NO TIDINGS.

It was noon of the next day and the guide had not returned to the new settlement.

The gloom that had fallen upon the people was great, for Don Ellwardo was loved by all.

The night had passed with little sleep

save for the older people, a guard had been kept at the stockade, and several horsemen patrolled the banks of the stream, though the guide had told them it was impassable to horse or man.

Miss Ellwardo, Idolene, and Mora seemed to be the bravest of the lot.

They did not regard the Don as lost to them, but considered him kidnapped for ransom, and hoped he would soon be restored to them, when the money was demanded and paid.

The guide they felt would in some way rescue him, and all most anxiously awaited his return.

It was afternoon when Mora and Harry Hartley were heard to give a cheer, and soon after Dart Deering approached.

His horse was fagged out, and he looked haggard and wearied himself.

His story was soon told.

"I went to the place you told me, Mora, and there was just light enough for me to follow their trail and discover that they were making westward."

"As they could only go one way from there, and as the night was clear, I had little trouble in following the trail to the river."

"There I lost it in spite of all my search, but I am confident that they have a retreat near there, and, as Miss Ellwardo says, will hold the Don for ransom."

"When they can do so with safety to themselves, they will open negotiations with us, and until then we must wait."

"In my opinion, the secret is out of their following us, for hearing that the Don had a treasure along, they sought to capture either Miss Ellwardo or himself, or some one else prominent in the train."

"I'll still keep up the search though, and would be glad to have a dozen men of the train go with me to where I lost the trail."

This was decided upon, and Captain Hartley selected six of the men and Mora and Harry also to accompany the guide.

They were to leave after nightfall, so as not to be seen should the kidnappers' spies be watching them, and the guide would conduct them to the place where he lost the trail and they would go into camp.

Then they would begin search at dawn and be strong enough to attempt a rescue if they found the outlaws' camp.

This they did, going into camp before midnight, and at dawn being in the saddle again.

The whole day passed, yet not a trace of the outlaws could be found after they reached the river.

The men at last decided that they must give it up, and Mora agreed with them, though Deering said he would remain by himself and keep it up.

This he did, while the others returned to the settlement, as all feared an attack might be made there.

It was midnight when they arrived, and a pall seemed to fall upon all when they reported their want of success.

Mrs. Ellwardo wept in secret, but Idolene bravely said that her father would return to them all right.

Then all placed their trust in the untiring guide.

One, two, three days passed and Dart Deering did not return, and much anxiety was felt as to his safety.

The fourth day he returned, looking as though he had had an attack of illness.

But he had found no trace of the Don's kidnappers.

A week, two weeks, went by, and still no tidings of the Don or his captors, though Dart Deering was untiring yet in his search.

And so time passed by with deep gloom hovering over Alabama Vale.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

WINNING A BATTLE.

The command which Buffalo Bill was to be guide and scout for arrived on time at the rendezvous agreed upon.

The scout was there to meet them, and was glad to see that Colonel Sumner had left the command of the fort to the

next officer in rank and had himself led the expedition.

"Well, Cody, what news have you for me?" he asked as he dismounted at the camp fire.

"Good news, colonel."

"Out with it."

"The campaign which you thought would be a long one, sir, will end very quickly."

"And how so?"

"The Indians are having a grand pow-wow at the head village of the tribes, and I find that they have called in all their scouts."

"This means an intended raid."

"Yes, sir."

"When will they strike, and where?"

I got the whole thing, sir, from White Hair, the old half-breed scout, who you know is my friend."

"Can you trust him?"

"With my life, sir."

"Well?"

"He says that they are picking their warriors and ponies from the villages and are assembling at Head Centre to move upon your fort."

"They expect to come within forty miles by day, dash the rest of the distance by night, and surprise you, for they have an idea that your force has been cut down to a couple of hundred, to send troops further north."

"It is to be after this expedition?"

"They believe it has already been done, for a Cheyenne chief told them so, and when I found out who he was I knew his motive, to get revenge on the Sioux who would not let him have the old chief's daughter for his wife."

"He pretended he did not care, took another Sioux girl, but will send the braves of the villages into a trap, and skip away himself."

"Then he may play into our hands?"

"Yes, sir, as he will send the Sioux off on this raid, expecting sure success, and you can ambush them in the Red Canyon, for I will guide you there to-morrow night, and then go ahead to report when the Sioux leave their head village, and will come to where you will entrap them."

"That is a good idea, Cody."

"But how many warriors will come?"

"As near as I can get at it through White Hair, sir, and knowing the force of each village, they will not have less than fifteen hundred or two thousand at most."

"We can handle them with ease."

"Yes, sir, and one good defeat will stop all their raids for a long time, and you will not have to strike at their villages separately."

"You are right, and you have done splendid work, Cody."

"It was a wise move of yours to come on well ahead of the command to scout."

"It is your style, though, to do the right thing at the right time."

"Now have supper with me, for you must have just got here yourself."

"Only a few minutes, sir, ahead of you."

After supper the general and his officers, with Buffalo Bill, had a long consultation, and a plan was formed for the surprise upon the Indians, instead of their surprising the soldiers at their fort.

Buffalo Bill explained the exact situation at Red Canyon, and how the Indians would doubtless camp there the first night, and they would be hemmed in and badly punished.

The next day the command, marching in close order, pulled out for Red Canyon, and arrived at noon, Buffalo Bill going on ahead as soon as the troops had been placed in position.

Within two hours the scout was back, his horse covered with foam, showing a hard ride.

He had kept clear of the trails, not wishing his tracks to be seen, and reported that the Indians were coming and would surely halt early in Red Canyon, as there was no water for miles on beyond.

He reported them as fully fifteen hun-

dred strong, and had seen their whole force crossing a plain, while he heard them singing their battle song as they rode along.

"We will make them change their tune," said Colonel Sumner quietly, and the order went the rounds to put all the men on the watch.

If the Indians did not discover the soldiers before entering the canyon through scouts out ahead, the two light guns were to open on them and be the signal for the infantry fire, followed by the charge of the cavalry.

If discovered, then the whole force was to dash out and give battle.

On came the redskin army, looking terrible in their war paint and equipments, and they were singing a war song as they rode into the Red Canyon.

They had not yet put scouts out ahead, and flankers, not considering it necessary, as they did not believe a white man was within a hundred miles of them.

The last of the force was just entering the canyon when the two light guns opened the battle by sending shells bursting into the crowded ranks, just as hundreds of braves had dismounted to go into camp.

The surprise was complete, the roar of big guns and infantry incessant, the slaughter great, even before the wild rush of the cavalry with revolver and sabre.

It became a panic-stricken mass, a stampede on horseback and afoot, a rush for life, and the battle was won, the whole force that had escaped being scattered to the four winds, and the warriors from the different villages working only to get to their homes to protect them from the terrible pale-face braves.

"Cody! we have won, and you deserve the credit," said Colonel Sumner, grasping the scout's hand warmly.

"We will camp in the Red Canyon for a week, burying the dead, caring for the wounded and sending out large scouting parties to warn the Indians that we are carrying the war to their own country."

"Then we will return to the fort and you can go back to Advance City and finish out your leave, with a month longer time if you wish."

Buffalo Bill thanked Colonel Sumner, and it was just two weeks after his hasty return to duty, that he rode away from the fort on his way back to Advance City to finish out his leave of absence.

He was also anxious to know something of Don Ellwardo and his party, for no news had come since they had started, and several couriers had come in from the South, and yet brought no letter from Dart Deering.

If the scout had only known why.

CHAPTER LXIX.

THE PRISONER'S SECRET.

Buffalo Bill reached Advance City without particular adventure on the way.

It was in the afternoon when he arrived, and he rode up to the Good Cheer Inn stable and dismounted.

Taking his saddle bags and other equipments with him he went into the inn.

Few people were about, all seeming to be off at work, save the idlers who were never known to work.

Entering the inn Buffalo Bill saw the clerk, a young man who was an all-round fellow, most useful to the landlord.

"Where is the boss, Nick?" he asked.

"He went East on the coach, sir, as he sent a valuable box through and wished to guard it to the first railroad station."

"He'll be back in a few days, sir, but I'll take good care of you."

"No doubt of that; but I am sorry he is not here."

"Any news?"

"We've got your prisoner, Denver, in the Tomb, Sir, waiting for your testimony to hang him, and the boss left me the keys, and the people suspect it and I have been half afraid they would take them from me and hang him, for they are mighty set against him."

"I guess they won't."

"But how is Quick Shot Kit and Dave Sully?"

"Both well, sir, that is they have left the inn."

"Any news from Dart Deering?"

"Not a word, sir, and the boss has been anxious about him and the train."

"So am I."

"I'll go out and have a talk with Denver."

With this Buffalo Bill left the inn, walked toward the Tomb and heard his name called before he reached it.

He did not see any one near, so the call came from the lockup.

"Oh, Mr. Cody, I is so glad ter see yer," cried the man eagerly.

"Well, Denver, I should think you would not be, for you know my testimony can hang you, for Nick told me what had taken place."

"Yes, sir, but ther men wants ter swing me up, now Landlord Waring is gone, and I is awful scared."

"But I'll tell you a big secret if you'll save me, for I were secretly told thet men is goin' ter hang me ter-night, cuttin' the logs down to get me out."

"This must not be, for you are my prisoner."

"I will protect you."

"All of 'em will be agin you, Pard Buffalo Bill, and the only way you kin help me is ter take me out now, when nobody is near."

"But why should I take you out?"

"You wants ter know my secret."

"Ah! what is it?"

"If you considers it worth while will you rescue me now?"

"Yes, if it is worth your life."

"It is worth more lives than mine."

"Well, out with it."

"I has yer pledge ter save me?"

"Yes, under the conditions I told you."

"I never heerd of Buffalo Bill goin' back on his word."

"You never will."

"Thank the Lord!"

"Well, what is it?"

"Dart Deering is your friend?"

"Yes."

"Well, he's in trouble."

"How do you know?"

"I has pards as knows, fer I belongs to a band of Kidnappers of the Gold Trail. I hain't afraid ter tell yer now I has yer word."

"Yes, yes."

"They'd get me out, only they don't want ter be know'd, and thar hain't enough of 'em ter fight ther town."

"Well."

"Dart Deering was ter be guide of ther train yer give up going with?"

"Yes."

"Well, he hev been captured by the kidnappers, and will be kilt soon."

"Where is he?"

"In one of their strongholds beyond Last Resort."

"Do you know the place?"

"I knows it well."

"How many of the gang are there?"

"Two, only, now."

"Will you lead me there?"

"I will, fer saving my life."

"When?"

"As soon as yer gits me out of here."

"I'll do it at once, for it will be dark in half an hour."

"Good! good!"

"I'll go and get the keys, have my horse saddled, and another mount for you down the trail, for if I am seen leading an animal here I may be checked."

"I will be back within half an hour, and if you serve me well you are a fre man, if you deceive me you will be a dead one very quickly."

CHAPTER LXX.

A DARING RESCUE.

Buffalo Bill returned to the inn and had a talk with Nick.

The result was that Wash Waring's best horse was saddled, and another fine animal also.

The latter was led to a place half a mile away from the settlement.

Buffalo Bill got Wash Waring's black horse, Sable Satan, as he had given him to the landlord, and knew his wonderful speed, endurance, and strength.

His own horse was too tired after the long trail he had come.

The scout's traps, a fresh bag of provisions, and Denver's weapons were sent with the horse that was to remain in waiting.

Then Buffalo Bill got the keys from Clerk Nick, and, looking well to his weapons, started for the Tomb.

No one was in sight, but as he unlocked the log door a man spied him and ran up toward the inn to make a report.

"Denver, I am taking enough chances without giving you any over me, so I have a lariat here to tie you with, and I shall see that, as you ride behind me, I get into no further trouble that the gang will give me, for that fellow has spread the alarm."

Buffalo Bill spoke with perfect calmness, and his movements were not hurried as he stepped into the prison pen and securely bound the man, who was glad to escape under any terms.

Mounting his horse, he, by an effort of his phenomenal strength, leaned over, seized the prisoner, and threw him to a seat behind his saddle, then slipping his own arms in loops of the lariat, so that the man could not be thrown off.

"Now we are ready, and we have got to run the gantlet, for the gangs are gathering."

With this Buffalo Bill called to Sable Satan, and away dashed the splendid animal with his double load.

"Somebody's rescuing Denver!"

"Hang 'em both!"

"Shoot 'em!"

"Kill ther horse and spill 'em!"

Such were the cries that were heard.

Men rushed out of the saloons and cabins and, seeing the horse flying along, drew their revolvers and opened fire.

But, bending low in the saddle, Buffalo Bill made Sable Satan fairly fly, while the bullets flew wild.

No one was mounted to go in chase, and Nick saw the black animal fly by the inn like a whirlwind, unhurt, as were also his riders, under the fire poured upon them.

The horse in waiting was reached, Denver was put in the saddle, and a turn of the lariat made him fast to the horn.

Then Buffalo Bill mounted, and, just at dark, and as distant hoofs were heard approaching, they dashed off of the trail into the dark pine timber.

The daring rescue and escape had been accomplished.

"We cannot be followed now, Denver, so lead the way to where Dart Deering is held a prisoner, and, remember, freedom if you serve me truly, death if you fail me."

"I knows it."

"I'll sarve yer true, and then git out of this country, fer I'm tired of it, and I has a leetle nest egg I has laid by, fer I sent it east as I got it."

"Yas, I'll be kilt fer sarvin' you ef I stays, and I'll move along mighty swift, I'll tell yer."

It was midnight when Denver, acting as guide, drew rein and said:

"We'll leave our horses here, pard."

"Yer see, the stronghold is in a cave up ther cliff, and ther trail is fer a man only."

"And there are two guards?"

"Yas."

"And Deering is there?"

"Yas, and one more."

"Who is it?"

"Ther captin of ther train of settlers Dart Deering was ter guide."

"Don Ellwardo?"

"Thet same."

"How do you know?"

"Waal, I is one of ther gang, yer

knows, and 'tothers would come by my prison and tell me things."

"Dave Sully and Quick Shot Kit belongs, and they'd tell me, too."

"Where are they?"

"At ther headquarter camp."

"They went two days ago."

"Where is that?"

"Fifteen miles from this one, and near whar ther Don's train hev gone into camp, waitin' fer him."

"He was kidnapped for ransom?"

"Thet same, only ther chief wants big ransom, an' thar is a hitch in ther proceedings, I hears."

"Is that fellow Red Rob the chief?"

"He hain't; he's but a stool pigeon."

"Who is?"

"Waal, you knows him, and as a bad one, I guesses, for I knows him, too, and he's about ther worst on ther border, fer all his bein' sich a gent in looks and ways."

"Who is he?"

"Ross Moore."

"Ah! I half believed it, and I came to this country a month ago to find him, as I had heard he had been seen here."

"Yes, he is the worst of them all, and if I capture him you are good for one thousand dollars in gold, as there is a big reward on his head, dead or alive."

"We'll make ther money."

"Now, follow me, and I'll give ther signals all right."

Buffalo Bill, a revolver in each hand, followed Denver up the steep cliff trail until the light of a campfire appeared before them.

CHAPTER LXXI.

A STORY OF CRIME.

Denver halted when well in sight of the light.

The scout saw a cave before him, the fire in the rear of it, so that three forms lying on blankets were visible, and one man was seated, rifle across his lap, on a campstool just at the entrance.

The man was asleep, and Denver whispered.

"That's jist why I didn't git challenged."

"You kin pick him off while he's asleep."

"No, I would not fire on a sleeping man."

"I'll take my own way, for you have done yours, and, as you are bound, crouch down there out of danger, if they fire."

The man obeyed, and, sheltered by a tree, Buffalo Bill called out.

"Hands up, quick!"

The man sprang to his feet, gasping at his rifle, and fired at random in his dazed condition, while one of the others in the cavern, also, was at once up, revolvers in hand.

"Surrender or I will kill you!" shouted the scout, and the response was a volley of shots.

Then Buffalo Bill fired, and very deliberately, twice only.

Down went the guard with the rifle, and the other fell next, while the two others in the cave gave a cheer.

The man at the entrance was not dead, but mortally wounded, and Buffalo Bill said:

"Why, you are Quick Shot Kit?"

"I is," and he held up his hands, still bandaged, and added:

"You've done fer me, and Dave Sully, too, for that's him."

"I knows you, Buffalo Bill, and you'll find pards of your'n here."

"We was sent here by ther chief as guards, being wounded, and it has cost us our lives."

"Waal, I meant to act squar' by Pard Deering, as he'll tell yer, only I didn't know they hed doubled on him, and I couldn't do nothin' here, fer see them irons they has on 'em."

The man's voice was growing weaker, and a voice in the cave called out:

"Yes, poor fellow, he did try to help us."

"But, how are you, old pard, Bill?"

"Dart Deering, I am glad to see you indeed."

"As I am to see you—here is the Don, also, and look at our ornaments."

Buffalo Bill did look, and saw that the two prisoners were manacled, and Quick Shot Kit did not know where the chief hid the keys.

But Denver was more in his confidence than any one else, and he knew, so the two prisoners were soon set free.

Just as they were freed Quick Shot Kit called out:

"Good-by, pards, all. I—"

He could say no more, and soon after passed into the sleep of death.

"We must lose no time, for the chief or some of the band may come at any time, and Denver is to guide us to the stronghold, where he says there are eight or ten more of the band, while I have the names he gave me of those in Advance City and Last Resort."

"We'll leave the dead to be buried later, and their horses are down in the canyon, and you can ride them."

Such was Buffalo Bill's plan, and not thoroughly trusting Denver, he set him free of the lariat and gave him the weapons.

Half an hour after the party of five were mounted and on their way to Alabama Vale.

As they rode along Dart Deering said: "Bill, I did not keep my pledge to you, and I will tell you why, for Don Ellwardo knows."

"I left Advance City to go to the Don's camp, and I was warned by Quick Shot Kit of an ambush, and he made me go the long trail."

"It was guarded, also, but he did not know it."

"It was guarded by but one man, and he knew of my coming."

"To tell you all, that man you have heard of as Ross Moore, and his life has been one long career of crime."

"He began when in his teens, brought off an engagement between Wash Waring and a girl he loved as he did his life, Dart telling her lies about him."

"Then he married the girl, as she believed, but he was already married."

"When she found out the truth she took her own life."

"Later, Ross Moore killed a man who robbed his own home, and shot his brother in making his escape, the wound nearly proving mortal."

"From bad to worse he went, and committing other crimes, his brother was accused of them, and he, too, became a fugitive until he could prove his innocence, which he later did."

"But a cloud was upon him, and he became a wanderer."

"To shorten my story of this wicked man, I will say that he developed into a road-agent chief, and began a life of outlawry in this part of the country."

"He had met the Ellwardo, had brayed told that the Don was carrying a large treasure, went with him, though intending to be poor, and that treasure he determined to get possession of."

"To do this he intended to guide the Don's train."

"He it was that met me on the trail and for the first time forced me to point my hand against him."

"He forced me into a duel, and shot him in his left hand, for he is a handed."

"He shot me in the head, by a strange coincidence, in the very spot where I was wounded in the Good Luck Saloon."

"It stunned me, and when I recovered consciousness I found myself his prisoner and bound."

"He took me to his men, they brought me here, and a few days after Don Ellwardo was brought here, for that Rossmore Deering, is my twin brother, and we are strangely alike in face and form."

"He deceived the Don, became

guide, made him a prisoner at the first night halt on the trail, and is in his settlement, trusted by all, yet holding the Don for a large ransom, which Mrs. Ellwardo cannot pay, as she has but little money and some old family jewels. "They were going to settle near three gold claims the Don owns, and if they pan out rich then all will be well."

CHAPTER LXXII.

CONCLUSION.

Buffalo Bill heard the story of a brother's crime from the lips of Dartmore Deering with amazement, and heard, too, that the guide would not ask mercy for the man who had so outraged the lives of all those with whom he had come in contact.

The party arrived at the settlement just before dawn, and Mora was on duty.

After welcoming his father, he said that the false guide was at his cabin.

Thither the party went, noiselessly; Mora called him up and asked him to come to the door, and a moment after Buffalo Bill's revolver was in his face and he was a prisoner.

The story quickly went the rounds of the cabins, and when Idolene knew all she said:

"I felt that I could not trust that man, and wondered why I had the feeling, after first having every confidence in him, as he believed."

Dart Deering himself was as warmly received as was the Don, and Denver, being the guide, it was decided that a score of men under Buffalo Bill should go to the outlaw stronghold that night.

They went, the outlaws were surprised, and, showing resistance, were shot down until the survivors cried for mercy.

It was shown them, and Buffalo Bill, Dart Deering, the Don, and Mora marched off to Advance City with their prisoners, the others returning to the settlement, save Denver, who was paid a few hundred dollars, given an outfit, and took Buffalo Bill's advice to leave the country.

When they reached Advance City the men there named as belonging to the kidnappers' band were captured, so that the Tomb had half a dozen occupants because when Wash Waring returned, the very night of the haul.

Wash Waring quickly called the people together, the prisoners were tried, and very quickly sentenced to die.

The next day they were all hanged save one, and that was not Red Rob, for he was the first to be swung up, while braying for mercy.

That one was Rossmore Deering, and he escaped hanging by taking a dose of poison he always kept with him.

So were the Kidnappers of the Gold Trail wiped out by Buffalo Bill and his companions, and Advance City took the hint, and built a church, as the first means of salvation.

When Buffalo Bill next visited that part of the country he found the Alama Vale people most prosperous, and more, he arrived in time to be present at the marriage of Idolene Ellwardo to Dartmore Deering, Wash Waring, who had become a United States Magistrate, performing the ceremony.

So ends the long trail, with Buffalo Bill one day a man across the half-century mark of life, and full of honors, justly won by a splendid career of twoscore years.

THE END.

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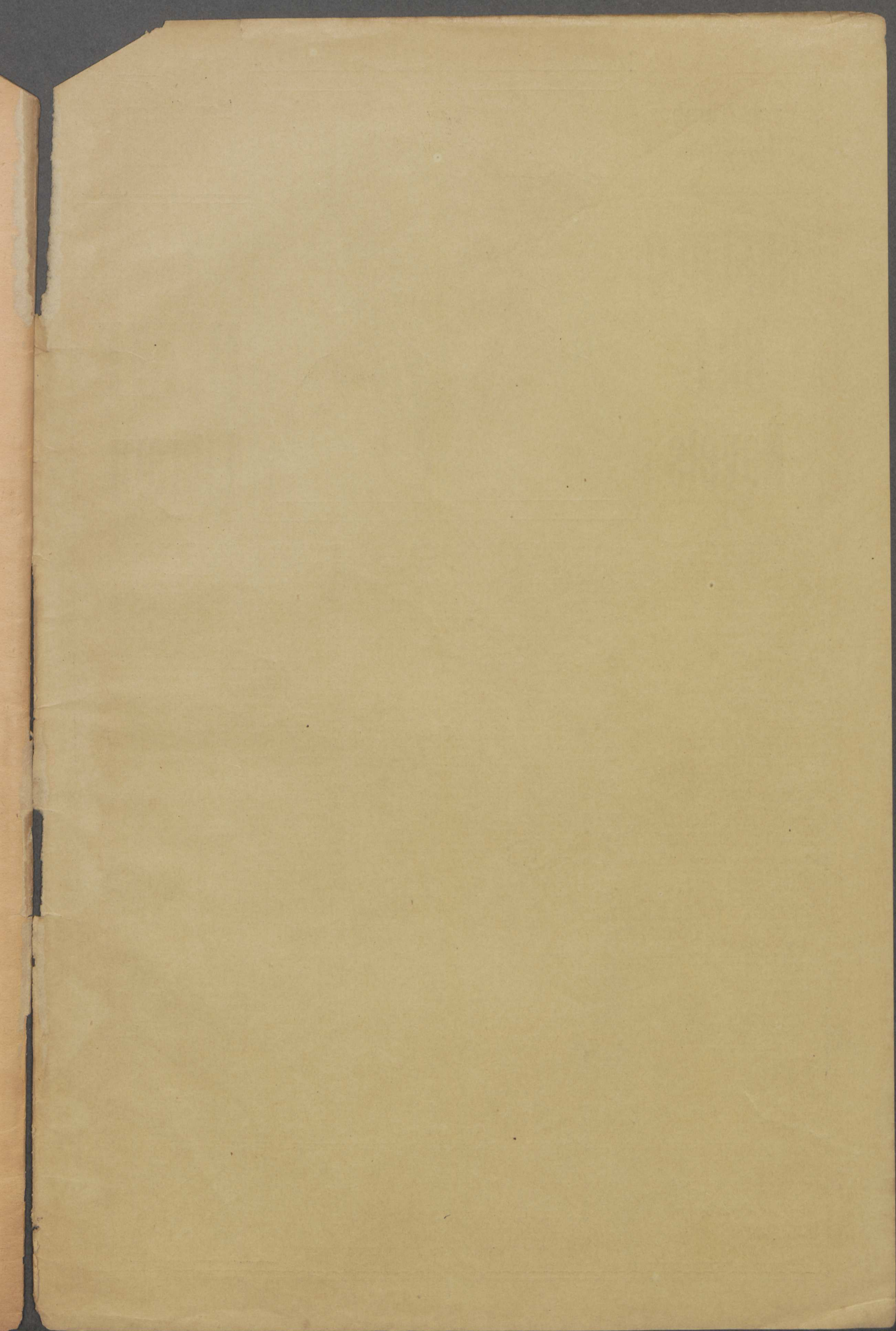
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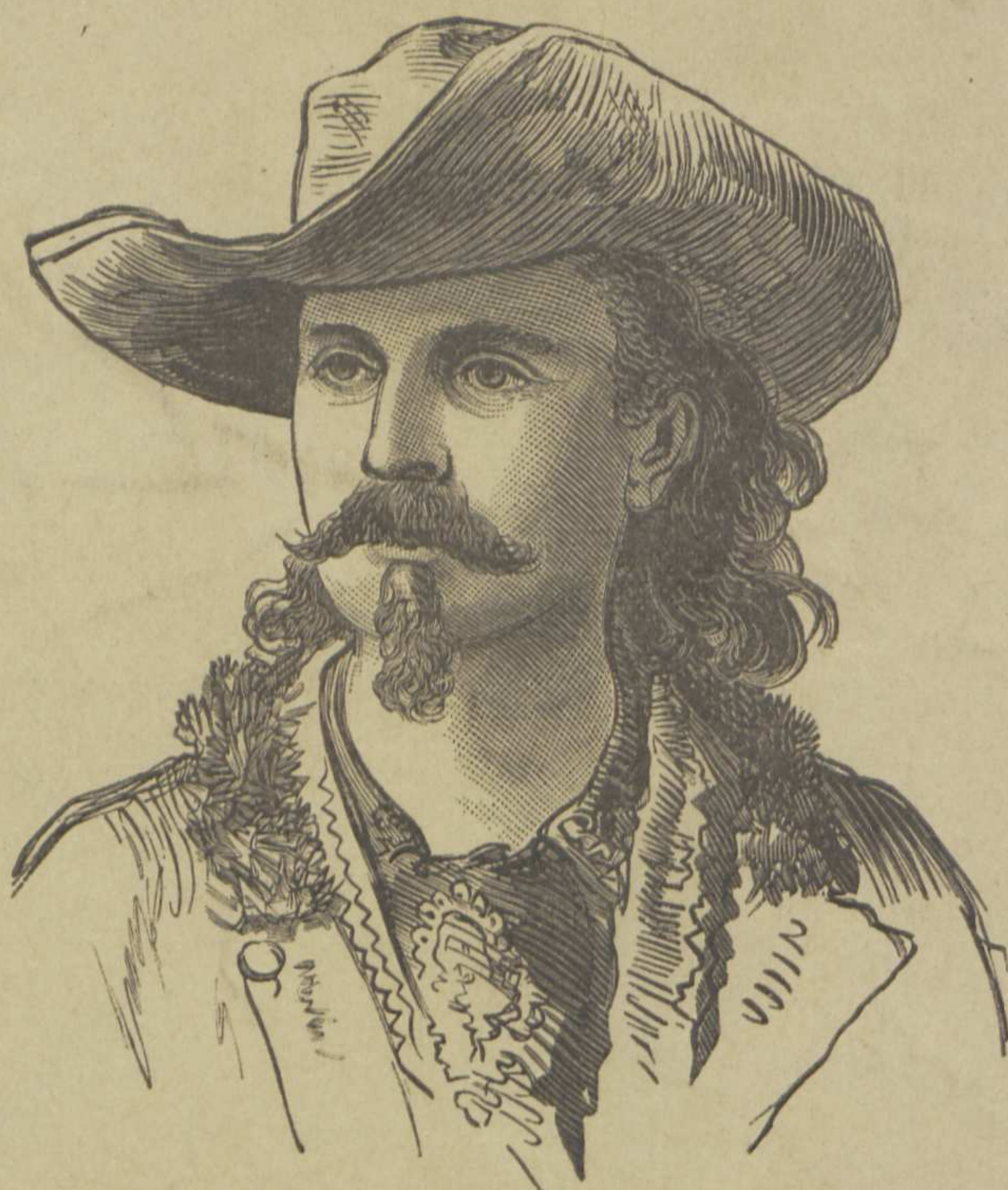
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